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Al-Ghazālī and *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*:

Their Influence on His Thought

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in Islamic Studies

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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In his *Munqidh*, al-Ghazālī states that there were four classes of seekers of truth at his time: the theologians, the followers of the doctrine of *Ta'lim*, the philosophers, and the Sufis. He depicts himself here as a Sufi who denounces the others, especially philosophy. This image of al-Ghazālī became the major perception of him from the beginning. But this perception changed completely in the twentieth century. The most recent scholarship challenges this image and views him as a kind of scholar who was heavily influenced by philosophy and disseminated its teachings in disguise. However, the concentration is given mostly to the philosophy of Ibn Sīnā while searching the source of this influence. While not denying the influence of Ibn Sīnā, this study argues that *Rasā'il Ikhwān Ṣafā'* must be taken

seriously as a major source of philosophical influence on al-Ghazālī's thought despite the negative remarks he makes about them. It tries to prove its argument first by situating al-Ghazālī's negative remarks in the political and social conditions of his time and second by comparing his works, especially his *Mishkāt al-Anwār*, with *Rasā'il*. For its purpose, this study considers al-Ghazālī as a philosopher whose main concern was to direct the attention of his readers to their inner states and the behaviors resulting from them. This concern led him to search for and develop an ethical theology in which the theory of the soul and its purification played a role of utmost importance. The study shows that during his search, al-Ghazālī found the essential ingredients of this theology in the work of Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', gave it a new form, and put it on the market with a new name, "the Science of the Hereafter" (*'ilm al-akhirah*) with its two subdivisions: the science of practice (*'ilm al-mu'āmalah*) and the science of unveiling (*'ilm al-mukashafah*).

The dissertation of Abdullah Ozkan is approved.

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INTRODUCTION

Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' tell a story about a wealthy man. This man was the exemplar of indulgence and the pursuit of worldly gratification. He was a model for all those who sought sensual pleasure and the satisfaction of their carnal appetites. This man did not think at all about religion, death, or the hereafter, and therefore did not do anything to improve his soul or better his character. Eventually, God decided to make an example out of him and to awaken him from his sleep of ignorance. He thus began to have the same nightmare every night until he became unable to continue on with his life as normal. He searched for the cure without success until one day a pious man sent him the correct interpretation of his dream and advised him to leave his luxurious life for the sake of the hereafter. He followed this advice until his heart became so clean that it was like a mirror in which the true nature of things was reflected without constraint. With the permission of God, he was given inspiration and support by an angel, and became the medium through which things behind the veil reached other men. Having thus turned into a wise man, he became the exemplar of otherworldly gratification.¹

A similar if not the same man appears in another place in their epistles, *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*. This time the man was a philosopher-physician with the utmost knowledge in the science of medicine. One day, he entered a city and saw that the people of the city were sick with a strange disease of which they were unaware. They did not feel the symptoms or any other indications of the disease. The man wanted to could cure their sickness out of mercy for them, but decided that if he informed them of their sickness they would likely not listen to him, or even scorn his knowledge and expertise. The fact that they were going to oppose him

¹ Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' wa Khullān al-Wafā'*, ed. 'Ārif Tāmīr (Beirut and Paris: Manshūrāt 'Uwaydāt, 1995), v. 4, 81–87; *The Epistles of the Sincere Brethren: An Annotated Translation of Epistles 43–47*, trans. Eric van Reijn (Onehunga: The Artful Publishing Company, 1988), 62–64. Note that van Reijn omits some passages in his translation.

if he told them of their illness saddened him, since he felt utterly compassionate towards them. Then he made a plan. He invited one of the prominent members of the society into his house and offered him a drink, which he had prepared beforehand in order to cure him. He also burnt incense to make him sneeze. As soon as the smoke entered the nose of his guest, the man sneezed and immediately felt lightness in his organs, comfort in his senses, health in his body, and strength in his spirit. He thanked the wise man for the treatment and asked him if he could do anything for him in return. The wise man told him he could return the favor by bringing another one of his friends to him for treatment. He brought another person, and the process went on in this way until they healed the whole society.²

The combination of these stories taken from *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* provide an outline of the life story of Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (505/1111), as he himself tells it in *Deliverer from Error (al-Munqidh min al-Ḍalāl)*. Like the man in the first story, he was the exemplar of worldly success. He held the most influential teaching position of his time and achieved public recognition. But in time, he realized that he had no hope of salvation in the hereafter if he continued down the path he was on. He wanted to leave it, but the desires of the world kept him in limbo until he became so sick that he was unable to speak or digest. The experts gave up all hope of treatment and told him that he suffered from a disease of the heart. He sought refuge in God, and God gave him the power to leave the mansion of deception for the sake of eternal happiness in the hereafter.³ Like the man in the second story, while in retreat and seclusion he witnessed that many of his contemporaries were sick with diseases of the heart. With this in his mind, he decided to return back to worldly life once more. This

² Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *Rasā'il*, v. 4, 17–18; *Epistles*, 8.

³ Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh min al-Ḍalāl*, in *Majmūat Rasā'il al-Imām al-Ghazālī*, ed. Aḥmad Shams al-Dīn (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1997), v. 7, 56–61; W. Montgomery Watt, *The Faith and Practice of Al-Ghazālī* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1953), 54–60.

time, however, he was not motivated by worldly desire but, like the philosopher-physician of the Ikhwān, by his compassion for his fellow men.⁴

The outline given above might obscure some of the details of al-Ghazālī's story as he presented it in *Deliverer*. As some of these details are important for the purpose of the present study, they deserve to be restated. Al-Ghazālī states that the intellectual quest for the true nature of things was an instinct and natural disposition given to him by God, and that he had thus made it a habit to search for them ever since his early years.⁵ Since there were four classes of seekers of truth at the time, and since he thought that the truth could not escape them, he began to investigate their doctrines thoroughly. These classes were the theologians, the followers of the doctrine of *Ta'lim*,⁶ the philosophers, and the Sufis.⁷

Al-Ghazālī drew the following conclusions about them after his investigation. Theology was incapable of leading one to the truth and was useful only in defending religion against heretics and infidels.⁸ The doctrine of *ta'lim* did not solve any problems, but instead created more. For al-Ghazālī, the Muslim community did not have a continual need for an infallible imam since it already had one in the form of the Prophet Muhammad.⁹ Even though some parts of philosophy, such as mathematics and logic, were correct, philosophy in general was wrong and dangerous for religion, especially its metaphysics. In this respect, he referred

⁴ Al-Ghazālī, *Munqidh*, 71-82; Watt, *Faith and Practice*, 68-85.

⁵ Al-Ghazālī, *Munqidh*, 25; Watt, *Faith and Practice*, 21.

⁶ *Ta'lim* means authoritative teaching by an infallible imam. Its derivation "*ta'limiyyah*" is used as another name for the Ismā'īlī sect. For details, see Mustafa Öz, "*Ta'limiyye*," *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi*, (Istanbul: Diyanet Vakfı Yayınları, 2010), v. 39, 548-549.

⁷ Al-Ghazālī, *Munqidh*, 31; Watt, *Faith and Practice*, 26-27.

⁸ Al-Ghazālī, *Munqidh*, 32-33; Watt, *Faith and Practice*, 27-29.

⁹ Al-Ghazālī, *Munqidh*, 48-55; Watt, *Faith and Practice*, 43-54.

in *Deliverer* to one of his other books, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers* (*Tahāfut al-Falāsifah*) in which he had asserted that the philosophers were in error in twenty matters. Of these, three warranted their being treated as infidels and seventeen warranted their being treated as heretics.¹⁰ The way of the Sufis was the sole path among the four classes which led to the truth. He left his position to pursue this path and for almost ten years lived in seclusion and retreat while practicing it. He said that the true nature and special characteristics of prophetic revelation became completely clear to him from the practice of Sufism.¹¹

This image of al-Ghazālī embracing Sufism while denouncing other three classes of seekers of truth, and especially philosophy, was the major perception of him from the beginning. However, this perception started to be viewed with skepticism in the twentieth century. William H. T. Gairdner published an article in 1914 about another of al-Ghazālī's works, *The Niche of Lights* (*Mishkāt al-Anwār*), which at that time was unknown in the West. He pointed out that al-Ghazālī might have held two different views regarding his approach to philosophy, one for the general public and one for the elite, since the ideas presented in *Niche* seemed to contradict what he expressed in *Deliverer* regarding his position on philosophy and in *Incoherence* regarding causality and occasionalism.¹² According to Gairdner, al-Ghazālī here was promoting a different cosmological theory more similar to the emanationist theory of the philosophers. In this theory, God was not the immediate creator of every existent being in every moment, as proposed in the occasionalism of the theologians, but rather the first cause of existence and the totality of existence poured from him necessarily in an orderly fashion. In

¹⁰ Al-Ghazālī, *Munqidh*, 34-47; Watt, *Faith and Practice*, 29-43.

¹¹ Al-Ghazālī, *Munqidh*, 56-65; Watt, *Faith and Practice*, 54-63.

¹² W. H. T. Gairdner, "al-Ghazālī's *Mishkāt al-Anwār* and the Ghazālī Problem," *Der Islam* 5 (1914): 153; Frank Griffel, "The Western Reception of al-Ghazālī's Cosmology from the Middle Ages to the 21st Century," *Dîvân: Disiplinler Arası Çalışmalar Dergisi* 30 (2011): 34-37.

this theory, the ordering and commanding of the universe is left to secondary causes.¹³ Gairdner concluded his article with a question of this double-sidedness of al-Ghazālī and named it “the Ghazālī Problem.”¹⁴

Scholars like ‘Abd al-Dā’im Abū al-‘Aṭā al-Baqarī and Josef van Ess began to express their doubts about the historical veracity of the events related by al-Ghazālī in *Deliverer*. Al-Baqarī claimed in 1943 that al-Ghazālī wrote the book mainly in order to justify his return to teaching in Nishapur.¹⁵ For him, *Deliverer* should not be taken literally because it was a fiction written to reflect an idealized version of al-Ghazālī’s life without providing historical facts about his intellectual and psychological states.¹⁶ For Josef van Ess as well, taking *Deliverer* as an autobiography was a mistake.¹⁷ He claimed in 1985 that the book was “nothing but a great apology”¹⁸ written as a response to a campaign against al-Ghazālī after his return to teaching in Nishapur.¹⁹ He also showed that while composing his book, al-

¹³ Gairdner, “al-Ghazālī’s Mishkāt,” 128–129.

¹⁴ Gairdner, “al-Ghazālī’s Mishkāt,” 153. In 1924 Gairdner published the translation of *Mishkāt al-Anwār* with the extended version of his article as an introduction to it: W. H. T. Gairdner, *Al-Ghazzālī’s Mishkāt al-Anwār (“The Niche for Lights”): A Translation with Introduction* (London: The Royal Asiatic Society, 1924).

¹⁵ ‘Abd al-Dā’im Abū al-‘Aṭā al-Baqarī, *‘Itirāfāt al-Ghazālī aw Kayfa Arrakhhkha al-Ghazālī Nafsah* (Cairo: Maṭba‘at Lajnat al-Ta’līf wa-al-Tarjamah wa-al-Nashr, 1943), 10.

¹⁶ Al-Baqarī, *‘Itirāfāt*, 160–161.

¹⁷ Josef van Ess, “Quelques Remarques Sur le *Munqidh Min ad-Dalāl*,” in *Ghazālī: La Raison et le Miracle: Table Ronde Unesco 9-10 decembre 1985*, Paris: Editions Maisonneuve et Larose, 1987, 57–68

¹⁸ Van Ess, “Quelques Remarques,” 63.

¹⁹ Kenneth Garden, *The First Islamic Reviver: Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī and His Revival of the Religious Sciences* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 7–8.

Ghazālī borrowed various styles of narration from his predecessors like al-Ḥarith al-Muḥāsibī, ‘Umar Khayyām, and Nāsir-i Khusraw.²⁰

Richard M. Frank argued in 1992 that al-Ghazālī used the basic principles of Ibn Sīnā’s philosophy so conspicuously that his thought contrasted fundamentally with the classical Ash‘arite theology to which he formally adhered.²¹ Frank asserted that what al-Ghazālī rejected in this philosophy was rather harmless and insignificant compared to some of what he himself used.²² Frank published another book in 1994 on the relationship of al-Ghazālī to the Ash‘arite school.²³ He repeated his argument in this book more precisely by asserting that al-Ghazālī accepted the cosmology of the philosophers thoroughly and conceived a restricted will of God in its government.²⁴ According to Alexander Treiger, Frank’s contributions to the topic demonstrated that Ibn Sīnā’s influence on al-Ghazālī was pervasive and his thought could not be understood without reference to Ibn Sīnā.²⁵

By expressing this opinion, Treiger was highlighting the direction Ghazalian studies took after Frank’s publications, and the direction was towards the philosophy of Ibn Sīnā. But before Treiger, Frank Griffel published a comprehensive study of al-Ghazālī in 2009. Griffel claimed in his study that without a complete understanding of al-Ghazālī’s cosmological

²⁰ Van Ess, “Quelque Remarques,” pp. 64-67; Garden, *the First Islamic Reviver*, p. 7.

²¹ Richard M. Frank, *Creation and the Cosmic System: al-Ghazālī and Avicenna* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1992), 10–11.

²² Frank, *Creation and the Cosmic System*, 86.

²³ Richard M. Frank, *Al-Ghazālī and the Ash‘arite School* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1994).

²⁴ Frank, *Al-Ghazālī*, 4.

²⁵ Alexander Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge in Islamic Thought: al-Ghazālī’s Theory of Mystical Cognition and Its Avicennian Foundation* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 3.

stance, it was impossible to have a coherent understanding of his theology.²⁶ He also challenged the self-representation of al-Ghazālī in *Deliverer*. He argued that al-Ghazālī was evasive about the correct nature of his relation to Sufism in his early life, about his involvement with the politicians of his time, and about his philosophical training under the guidance of his most famous teacher al-Juwaynī.²⁷

According to Griffel, al-Ghazālī developed his own cosmology in between Ash‘arism and Ibn Sīnā’s philosophy. However, his cosmology was much closer to the side of Ibn Sīnā than that of the Ash‘arites due to al-Ghazālī’s inclination to systematical thinking, since Ibn Sīnā’s system was more systematical than the Ash‘arite one.²⁸ For Griffel, al-Ghazālī, who as a Muslim theologian always wished to keep God in his sublime place, found a refined way to appropriate Ibn Sīnā’s determinist cosmology while preserving God’s free will over his creation.²⁹ His main goal with this approach was to protect the notion of God’s omnipotence while reminding readers of the usefulness of the natural sciences, especially for those readers who might not understand the subtleties of these two stances.³⁰ Even though Griffel did not think that al-Ghazālī broke away from Ash‘arism, he argued that al-Ghazālī’s theology and philosophy were “a particular kind of Avicennism.”³¹

This “particular kind of Avicennism” was forcefully asserted again with the publication of Alexander Treiger’s book in 2012. In his introduction, Treiger pointed out a recent paradigm change in Ghazalian studies. According to Treiger, “scholars have identified

²⁶ Frank Griffel, *al-Ghazālī’s Philosophical Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 9.

²⁷ Griffel, *Philosophical Theology*, 19–59.

²⁸ Griffel, *Philosophical Theology*, 11.

²⁹ Griffel, *Philosophical Theology*, 12.

³⁰ Griffel, *Philosophical Theology*, 285.

³¹ Griffel, *Philosophical Theology*, 14.

considerable problems with al-Ghazālī's presentation of his engagement with philosophy."³² His *Incoherence* is not based on *The Intentions of the Philosophers* (*Maqāṣid al-Falāsifah*) as al-Ghazālī claimed, so *Intentions* was probably written at an earlier time rather than the time he himself stated. The sophistication of *Incoherence* suggests a lifelong engagement with philosophy, so his claim in *Deliverer* that he mastered philosophy in two years with an additional year of reflection cannot be credible. *Deliverer* was written as an apology related to the Nishapur controversy, so his narrative regarding philosophy in this work must be taken with a grain of salt. With these problems in mind, Treiger stated that "the question of al-Ghazālī's intellectual leanings, his attitude to philosophy, his methodology, and his theological agenda has therefore to be opened anew."³³

According to Treiger, al-Ghazālī endorsed many philosophical teachings that he condemned in *Incoherence* and *Deliverer*. This led Treiger to conclude that *Incoherence* was a pseudo-refutation.³⁴ He answered the question of why al-Ghazālī wrote this work with a direct quotation from Frank Griffel: "By criticizing a selected number of teachings in the *falāsifa*'s metaphysics and natural sciences, al-Ghazālī aims to make room for the epistemological claims of revelation."³⁵ Treiger argued that al-Ghazālī tried to cover up his dependence on philosophy, and especially his dependence on the writings of Ibn Sīnā, throughout his whole career. In order to accomplish this, al-Ghazālī adopted Ibn Sīnā's noetics and the theory of prophecy almost completely but replacing their terminology with a more mystical sounding one which he derived from more acceptable religious sources. Al-

³² Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge*, 3.

³³ Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge*, 4.

³⁴ Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge*, 93–96.

³⁵ Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge*, 94.

Ghazālī presented it in this manner in order to escape from the criticism of religious scholars, as exemplified during the Nishapur controversy.

In Treiger’s own words, “in the guise of a critic, al-Ghazālī was, in fact, one of the greatest popularizers of philosophy in medieval Islam, indeed a kind of a ‘Trojan horse,’ which brought Avicenna’s philosophy into the heart of Islamic thought. After al-Ghazālī, Islam became once and for all inundated with Avicennian ideas.” He concluded that, “far from causing a downfall of philosophy (itself an invention of Western historians of Arabic philosophy), al-Ghazālī was in fact a key contributor to a deep philosophical transformation of all aspects of Islamic thought—including *Kalām* and Sūfism—and to an unprecedented flourishing of Avicennian philosophy itself.”³⁶

Most of the scholars mentioned above had pointed out that *Deliverer* must be read carefully since it was written under a special circumstance known as the Nishapur controversy. But none had provided the details of the controversy and its context. This changed in 2014 with the publication of a book by Kenneth Garden focusing on the context of the autobiographical writings of al-Ghazālī and improving scholars’ understanding of the controversy. Garden started his book by asserting that al-Ghazālī’s autobiography *Deliverer*, which had shaped the major perception of al-Ghazālī since its publication, did not come out of al-Ghazālī’s introspection in his final years. Instead, it was written as a response to the accusations that he faced during a campaign in which his opponents accused him of being an Ismaili Shiite and a philosopher.³⁷ Beyond being an apology, *Deliverer* also served for al-Ghazālī as a justification of his return to teaching in Nishapur and as a mean to establish his

³⁶ Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge*, 104.

³⁷ Garden, *First Islamic Reviver*, 1.

authority against those who wanted to undermine what he viewed as his unique and divinely guided experiences.³⁸

Garden argued that in his early years, al-Ghazālī was in the service of the Seljuks, and especially under the guardianship of the powerful vizier Nizām al-Mulk. After the political environment of the era changed and he lost his patron at the hands of an assassin, al-Ghazālī had to leave Baghdad.³⁹ The goal behind this departure was not exactly to live a life of retreat and seclusion, but rather to get ready for a radical campaign to change the religious scene of the time. The tool that was going to be used in this campaign was his *Revival of the Religious Sciences* (*Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*).⁴⁰ With publication of this book, al-Ghazālī started to promote the Science of the Hereafter which, according to Garden, was entirely his own invention and had little if anything to do with the Sufism he had identified as the true path in *Deliverer*. Al-Ghazālī based the Science of the Hereafter mostly on the doctrines of the philosophers.⁴¹ After he returned to his native land of Khurasan he continued to promote the revivalist agenda of *Revival*. But this did not go unnoticed by the opponents of al-Ghazālī and they conspired with the Sultan of the East, Sanjar, against him using a Maghribi scholar named al-Māzarī al-Dhakī. These events endangered the plans of al-Ghazālī, and in order to defend himself and his followers he wrote several books, the most famous of which was *Deliverer from Error*.⁴²

In reviewing the scholarship on al-Ghazālī, Garden uses the word “revisionist accounts” to describe the work of those scholars who followed the footsteps of Richard M. Frank in emphasizing Ibn Sīnā’s influence on al-Ghazālī, and considers his own work as a

³⁸ Garden, *First Islamic Reviver*, 2.

³⁹ Garden, *First Islamic Reviver*, 17–29.

⁴⁰ Garden, *First Islamic Reviver*, 30–59.

⁴¹ Garden, *First Islamic Reviver*, 63–121.

⁴² Garden, *First Islamic Reviver*, 125–168.

contribution to the biographical element of the philosophical dimension of al-Ghazālī's thought.⁴³ The scholars who can be seen as part of this revisionist approach are Jules Janssens, Frank Griffel, Scott Girdner, M. Afifi al-Akiti, Yahya Michot, and Alexander Treiger. All of them have contributed to the notion that al-Ghazālī was heavily influenced by the philosophers and used their ideas freely in his writings even though he seemed to oppose them on the surface.

Even though the scholars mentioned so far in this introduction clearly demonstrated al-Ghazālī's indebtedness to philosophy by showing that his own account of historical events, and especially what he said about his relation with philosophy, was not always reliable, they concentrated their attention mostly on the influence of Ibn Sīnā. This concentration caused them to miss one of the most important details of al-Ghazālī's story, namely his relation with *The Epistles of the Brethren of Purity (Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā')*, about which al-Ghazālī talks in various places in *Deliverer*, and what he said about them is important for the purpose of this study.

Al-Ghazālī accepts in *Deliverer* that he studied the works of Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'. The name, Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', appears in the section of the doctrine of Ta'lim. He states that in order to refute their doctrine he collected everything available about them and tried to understand it as much as possible. It is conceivable that the works al-Ghazālī collected included the works of Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', since he mentioned their name in this section and talked negatively about their philosophy, as one would expect given the fact that he was ostensibly attempting to refute their doctrine.⁴⁴ But in order to understand his negative talk, it should be kept in mind

⁴³ Garden, *First Islamic Reviver*, xii.

⁴⁴ Al-Ghazālī, *Munqidh*, 55; Watt, *Faith and Practice*, 53.

that one of the accusations he faced during the controversy was that he was a hidden follower of the Isma‘īlī sect, which somehow related to the Ikhwān.

In addition to the section on the doctrine of Ta‘līm, al-Ghazālī mentions the name Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’ again in the section on philosophy.⁴⁵ While elaborating two dangers pertaining to the different attitudes towards philosophy, al-Ghazālī uses only their name from among the several schools of philosophy as his most vivid example and designates the rest of the philosophical schools with the words “the others.” In these passages, the Ikhwān and their works, *Rasā’il*, are always at the center of the discussion. Al-Ghazālī explicitly states that *Rasā’il* is full of truth taken from legitimate sources even though they are mixed with false beliefs by their authors. For the reader, he concretizes *Rasā’il*’s case with the striking examples of the cupping-glass, snake, and dangerous waters of the ocean. These examples have been used by modern scholars without mentioning *Rasā’il* and Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’ in order to prove Ibn Sīnā’s influence over al-Ghazālī.⁴⁶

Although no substantial inquiry has been carried out on al-Ghazālī’s relation with *Rasā’il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’*, some scholars have noticed al-Ghazālī’s ambiguous attitude towards them. While arguing for the authenticity of all three chapters of *Niche* in 1992, Hermann Landolt stated that al-Ghazālī used the forty-second epistle of the Ikhwān while composing his book. According to Landolt, *Rasā’il* was the source of *Niche*’s Neoplatonism, and

⁴⁵ Al-Ghazālī, *Munqidh*, 46–47; Watt, *Faith and Practice*, 41–42. The fact that the section on philosophy comes before the section on the doctrine of Ta‘līm does not matter here.

⁴⁶ See for example Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge*, 96–101.

accordingly was the source of its heretic nature, as claimed by some of his contemporaries and noticed by modern scholars.⁴⁷

Another scholar who has noted this relation is Yahya Michot. In a paper published in 2008, Michot investigates the works of Ibn Taymiyya in order to document his perception of Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'. In doing so, he offers valuable comments on al-Ghazālī in passing.⁴⁸ According to Michot, when it comes to al-Ghazālī, Ibn Taymiyya was aware of two important facts about his thought: 1) the diversity of views displayed in his writings, and 2) the multiplicity of the sources that influenced him.⁴⁹ According to Ibn Taymiyya, in his writings al-Ghazālī vilified Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' on the one hand, but was accused by his opponents of being an Ismā'īlī sympathizer on the other hand.⁵⁰ Ibn Taymiyya reported that one of al-Ghazālī's most well-known enemies, al-Māzarī,⁵¹ said the following about him: "Some of the companions of (al-Ghazālī) informed me that he was addicted to reading the *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*."⁵² According to Ibn Taymiyya, al-Māzarī especially noted the similarities between *Niche* and the works of the philosophers.⁵³ Michot concludes his paper with several questions,

⁴⁷ Hermann Landolt, "Ghazālī and *Religionswissenschaft*": Some Notes on the *Mishkāt al-Anwār*," *Asiatische Studien: Zeitschrift der Schweizerischen Asiengesellschaft*, 45, 1991, 23–31.

⁴⁸ Yahya Jean Michot, "Misled and Misleading... Yet Central in their Influence: Ibn Taymiyya's Views on the Ikhwan al-Safa" in *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity: The Ikhwan al-Safa' and Their Rasa'il: An Introduction*, ed. Nader El-Bizri (New York: Oxford University Press in Association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2008), 139–179.

⁴⁹ Michot, "Misled and Misleading," 175.

⁵⁰ Michot, "Misled and Misleading," 176.

⁵¹ Kenneth Garden, "al-Māzarī al-Dhakī: al-Ghazālī's Maghribi Adversary in Nishapur", *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 21:1 (2010): 89–107.

⁵² Michot, "Misled and Misleading," 176.

⁵³ Michot, "Misled and Misleading," 177.

one of which is especially important for this study. He asks, “What is the real relevance of the convergences detected, or of the connections established, by Ibn Taymiyya, between the Ikhwān and other Muslim thinkers or movements of thought?”⁵⁴

Another scholar who has noticed this relation is Fatih Toktaş, who contributed to a volume about the philosophy of Ikhwān al-Şafā’ in 2013. Toktaş states in the chapter that the influence of Ikhwān al-Şafā’ on later Muslim scholars in general, and on Ibn Sīnā and al-Ghazālī in particular, could become a promising venue of research for young scholars.⁵⁵ Toktaş based his opinion on Muḥammad Ābid al-Jābirī’s discussion of Ibn Sīnā. According to Toktaş, al-Jābirī concluded that the influence of Ikhwān on Ibn Sīnā’s thought could not be dismissed.⁵⁶ Toktaş applies the same principal to al-Ghazālī and reaches the conclusion that al-Ghazālī himself was heavily influenced by the works of Ikhwān al-Şafā’, and especially by their theory of the soul.⁵⁷

This study follows these scholars by comparing al-Ghazālī’s works with *Rasā’il Ikhwān al-Şafā’*, and tries to show that despite al-Ghazālī’s negative comments about them and the heavily focused attention of modern scholarship on the influence of Ibn Sīnā over al-Ghazālī, *Rasā’il Ikhwān al-Şafā’* was one of the most important philosophical sources that shaped al-Ghazālī’s thought. The study bases itself on the conception that the overemphasis of Ibn Sīnā’s influence over al-Ghazālī has led scholars to focus their attention to an unwarranted extent on the competing cosmological theories of different schools. Without denying the effects of these theories on the psychological constitution of individuals, this study

⁵⁴ Michot, “Misled and Misleading,” 179.

⁵⁵ Fatih Toktaş, “İhvan-i Safa: Din-Felsefe İlişkisi ve Siyaset”, in *İslam Felsefesi: Tarih ve Problemler*, ed. M. Cüneyt Kaya (İstanbul: İsam Yayınları, 2013): 183–220.

⁵⁶ Toktaş, “İhvan-i Safa,” 216.

⁵⁷ Toktaş, “İhvan-i Safa,” 217.

assumes that al-Ghazālī's main concern was not to provide a coherent structure of the universe for his readers but rather to direct their attention to their inner states and the behaviors resulting from them.⁵⁸ It will argue that this concern led him to search for and develop an ethical theology in which the theory of the soul and its purification played a role of utmost importance. It will also show that during his search, al-Ghazālī found the essential ingredients of this theology in the work of Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', gave it a new form, and put it on the market with a new name, "the Science of the Hereafter." By identifying the similarities between al-Ghazālī's new science and the thought and theology of Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', this study aims to provide another approach to the "al-Ghazālī problem."

Other than the introduction and the conclusion, the study is divided into four chapters. The first chapter deals with the historical development of Ghazalian studies and can also be read as a literature review. It intends to show the modern change of perception about al-Ghazālī in a wider discussion of Islamic philosophy. It surveys the works of some major and influential Western scholars regarding al-Ghazālī and his place in Islamic philosophy. It touches upon some works of al-Ghazālī which played a role in the shaping and changing of opinions about him, such as *Incoherence*, especially its seventeenth discussion, and *Niche*. It also paves the way for the argument that al-Ghazālī was influenced by Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'. Showing that he has been moved from one end to the other in modern scholarship will make

⁵⁸ This notion has been noticed by Sherman Jackson as well. He makes similar remarks about al-Ghazālī's transformation from the consummate scholar of academe to a public intellectual who "desired to use his knowledge to improve his and other people's lives rather than simply add to the body of accumulated scholarship in a given field. This orientation would remain with him for the rest of his life." See, Sherman A. Jackson, *On the Boundaries of Theological Tolerance in Islam: Abu Hamid al-Ghazālī's Faysal al-Tafrika Bayna al-Islām wa al-Zandaqa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 37.

this study's attempt to push him a step further towards the Ikhwān more plausible and acceptable.

The second chapter deals with the connection between al-Ghazālī and *Rasā'il*. Firstly, it situates the subject in a broader perspective by incorporating some modern approaches to Islamic philosophy and a particular treatment of Ibn Sīnā into the discussion. Based on this discussion, it argues that al-Ghazālī's hesitation to acknowledge or deny the influence of *Rasā'il* upon him was not an issue particular to him, but one that was personally exemplified before him by Ibn Sīnā. Secondly, it argues that this hesitation was necessitated by the political and sociological conditions of the era, since *Rasā'il* were considered by the powerful to be a product of the adherents of a heretical sect, Ismā'īlism. And finally, it shows that al-Ghazālī faced a serious opposition from several quarters regarding his connection to philosophy and the heretics during the final years of his life. This period in his life is known as the Nishapur controversy, and his unfavorable remarks on the Ikhwān and their *Rasā'il* must be understood in this context.

The third chapter points out the similarities of al-Ghazālī's new science, the Science of the Hereafter, to the general project of Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' as laid out in their *Rasā'il*. It starts with a discussion of the circumstances which led al-Ghazālī to embrace a new strategy in his scholarly career. It also argues that al-Ghazālī was exposed to *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* no later than his departure from Baghdad in 1095. Following this discussion, the chapter moves to examine the structure, content, and purpose of al-Ghazālī's Science of the Hereafter in comparison with *Rasā'il*. It presents the two subdivisions of the Science of the Hereafter and focuses mostly on its first subdivision, the science of practice (*'ilm al-mu'āmalah*).

The fourth chapter compares the content of the science of unveiling (*'ilm al-mukāshafah*), which is the second subdivision of the Science of the Hereafter, to *Rasā'il*

Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', with particular attention to al-Ghazālī's *Niche of Lights*. It argues that the comparison is helpful in removing the modern perplexity regarding the sources of al-Ghazālī's science of unveiling. It shows that what the Ikhwān reveal about the content of their highest science in their *Rasā'il* finds its way into al-Ghazālī's *Niche*, which al-Ghazālī considers a contribution to the highest form of knowledge.

The main sources used in this study are naturally the works of al-Ghazālī and Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'. For al-Ghazālī's works, different works were used to varying extents in different chapters. The first chapter focuses on *Incoherence* and *Niche*, while the second chapter focuses on *Deliverer*. Nizām al-Mulk's famous book, *The Book of Government* (*Siyāsatnāme*), is also used in this chapter to exemplify the perception of the Ismā'īlī sect at the time. The third chapter focuses on *Revial* and *The Jewels of the Qur'ān* (*Jawāhir al-Qur'ān*). The fourth chapter once again focuses on *Niche*.

For *Rasā'il*, I did not limit myself to any one of the epistles but tried to use all of them, since the Ikhwān express unexpected opinions in unexpected places. For this reason, I used the 1994 edition of *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* edited and prepared for publication by 'Ārif Tāmīr. I also consulted the Dār Ṣādir edition prepared by Butrus al-Bustānī, published in Beirut in 1957. Whenever I opted to offer a translation from the Arabic materials used here, I have generally preferred to quote them from existing English-language translations rather than offering a translation of my own. In all such cases, the English-language sources are cited in the notes.

The secondary sources used in this study are given in the notes and the bibliography. The works of the revisionists listed above, however, have guided me throughout this study. Three scholars in particular deserved to be named here again. They are Frank Griffel,

Alexander Treiger, and Kenneth Garden. The publications of Farhad Daftary and the Institute of Ismaili Studies were also most helpful on the subject of the Ismā‘īlīs and the Ikhwān.

For transliteration, I have followed the Arabic Romanization table of the Library of Congress. I have kept the common words as they are in English as an exception to this transliteration system. For example, I did not write Islām instead of Islam, or Baghdād instead of Baghdad.

CHAPTER I

THE CHANGE OF PERCEPTIONS: AL-GHAZĀLĪ AND ISLAMIC PHILOSOPHY

1.1 Introduction

This chapter provides information about the historical development of Ghazālian studies. It intends to show that the modern perception about al-Ghazālī has changed completely. Once seen as the most famous enemy of philosophy, al-Ghazālī has come to be interpreted in recent scholarship as a Trojan horse of a particular kind of Avicennian philosophy. This chapter also argues that the change of perception about al-Ghazālī goes hand in hand with a broader change of perception about Islamic philosophy. For this reason, this chapter will focus on a discussion of Islamic philosophy as well.

Beginning with a general perspective, it surveys the works of some major and influential western scholars regarding al-Ghazālī and his place in Islamic philosophy, in conjunction with their opinions about the nature and fate of Islamic philosophy. It gradually narrows its focus, ending with the most current treatments of al-Ghazālī. During this process, it touches upon some works of al-Ghazālī which played a role in the shaping and changing of opinions about him, such as *The Incoherence of the Philosophers* (*Tahāfut al-Falāsifah*), especially its seventeenth discussion, and *The Niche of Lights* (*Mishkāṭ al-Anwār*). The reactions to these works in modern scholarship, either in the form of denial or acceptance, reveal the outlines of the debate regarding al-Ghazālī's true commitments. Finally, this chapter shows that modern scholarship accepts al-Ghazālī not as an enemy of philosophy, but rather as one of its most important figures.

This chapter also aims to pave the way for the argument that al-Ghazālī was influenced by Ikhwān al-Ṣafā, who were ostensibly also his enemies. Showing that he has been moved from one end to the other in modern scholarship would make pushing him a step further towards the Ikhwān more plausible and acceptable.

1.2 Al-Ghazālī as the Cause of the End of Islamic Philosophy

When Bertrand Russell published his *History of Western Philosophy* in 1945, he included in it a short chapter in which he dealt with Islamic philosophy.⁵⁹ According to him, Islamic philosophy is entirely unoriginal, and Muslim philosophers, including Ibn Sīnā (428/1037) and Ibn Rushd (595/1198), are essentially commentators on the ancients. While Muslim civilization might have incidentally contributed to the fields of mathematics and chemistry, it does not in general display any capacity for independent speculation in theoretical matters. Its importance lies in its existence as a transmitter of the ancient heritage to a more creative civilization, by which he means European civilization.⁶⁰

After providing a brief survey of political history, Russell declares that two Muslim philosophers require special attention: Ibn Sīnā and Ibn Rushd. According to Russell, Ibn Rushd was more important in Christian philosophy than in Islamic philosophy, since in the former he was a beginning while in the latter he was a dead end. In Europe, his influence was so great that some scholastics and freethinkers were called Averroists because of him,⁶¹ while in the Muslim world there was not any philosopher worthy of the name after his death.

⁵⁹ For Islamic philosophy, Russell uses the expression “Mohammedan Philosophy.” Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy: and its Connection with Political and Social Circumstances from the Earliest Times to the Present Day* (London: Routledge, 1996), 413–421.

⁶⁰ Russell, 420.

⁶¹ Russell, 419.

During Russell's lifetime, this was the general opinion of researchers about the fate of Islamic philosophy. But the narrative does not end here. It has a second part, in which the questions the first part evoked in the minds are answered. If philosophy died with Ibn Rushd in the Muslim world, what were the dynamics that caused this decline? Which political, social, and cultural conditions led to the disappearance of philosophy and freethinking from the Muslim societies? The second part of the story is an attempt to provide a consistent explanation for these kinds of questions. The most important figure in the second part of the story is al-Ghazālī.

For Russell, Ibn Rushd, like most Muslim philosophers, was not an orthodox Muslim thinker. But aside from the philosophers, there was also a sect of orthodox theologians who completely objected to philosophy as harmful to the faith. At this moment in the narrative, Al-Ghazālī enters the scene in his special role as the main antagonist. For Russell, al-Ghazālī, with the publication of his book *Destruction of the Philosophers*,⁶² was one of these orthodox theologians. They argued that, since the Qur'an included all necessary truth, revelation obviated any need for philosophical speculation. Ibn Rushd confronted al-Ghazālī with his book *Destruction of the Destruction*, but his efforts did not prevent the inevitable death of philosophy.

Even though Russell was not a specialist in Islamic philosophy, his brief treatment of the subject provides a thorough summary of the general understanding and the attitude of early scholarship towards the field. It is possible to say that this attitude was first articulated

⁶² The translation of the title of this book is suggestive of the intellectual climate of the time. Later, the word "Destruction" is replaced by "Incoherence." Recently, Alexander Treiger has asserted that this word also fails to render the meaning of the Arabic word "*Tahafut*." Instead, he prefers the term "precipitance." Alexander Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge in Islamic Thought: Al-Ghazālī's Theory of Mystical Cognition and its Avicennian Foundation* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 108–115.

almost a century earlier. Ernest Renan was one of the main contributors in this line of scholarship, especially with his book *Averroes and Averroism*. Even though the book is about Ibn Rushd and his influence in later European thought, its underlying structure is full of general assumptions about the nature of Semites and their thought. According to him, the Semites were talented only in mystical matters, and their interest lay in the otherworldly and non-rational subjects. Because of these attributes, they were associated mostly with religion as opposed to science. They played the role of intermediary in the transmission of knowledge from ancient Greece to modern Europe, and the transmission was completed when the torch was passed to them by Ibn Rushd.⁶³ In a way, these general assumptions were more influential than the main subject of the book itself, and they greatly affected the later generations of European scholars. In the book, Renan declares that “When Averroes died in 1198, Arab philosophy had lost its last representative and the triumph of the Qur’an over freethinking was assured for at least six hundred years.”⁶⁴

Renan’s *Averroes and Averroism* created the grand narrative of the fate of philosophy in Islam.⁶⁵ In this narrative, the translation movement that took place in the ninth and the tenth centuries produced great philosophers like Ibn Sīnā and Ibn Rushd, but this philosophical trend lost its energy during the twelfth century when orthodox Islam started a

⁶³ Dimitri Gutas, “The Study of Arabic Philosophy in the Twentieth Century: An Essay on the Historiography of Arabic Philosophy,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, v. 29, no. 1 (May, 2002), 8.

⁶⁴ Frank Griffel, “The Western Reception of al-Ghazālī’s Cosmology from the Middle Ages to the 21st Century,” *Dîvân Disiplinlerarası Çalışmalar Dergisi* 30 (2011/1), 36.

⁶⁵ For how Renan’s occupation as a philologist led him to form the notion of Semites, see Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 123–148. For Renan’s intentional misinterpretation of Ibn Rushd, see John Marenbon, “Ernest Renan and Averroism: The Story of a Misinterpretation,” in *Renaissance Averroism and Its Aftermath: Arabic Philosophy in Early Modern Europe*, eds. Anna Akasay and Guido Giglioni, (Dordrecht and New York: Springer, 2013), 273–284.

war against the philosophical movement, and this followed by the passing of the ancient heritage to the Christian civilization. In Renan's story, al-Ghazālī was depicted as the strongest enemy of philosophy, and one who was to have a decisive influence on later Islamic thought. As reflected clearly by Renan, the general attitude of European scholars in the nineteenth century was that Ibn Rushd was the defender of rationality and that al-Ghazālī was the advocate of religious orthodoxy.⁶⁶

In Renan's account, al-Ghazālī becomes the archrival of freethinking. His reading of *Deliverer from Error*, in which al-Ghazālī strongly distances himself from the philosophical movement, as the sincere account of al-Ghazālī's life led Renan to accept al-Ghazālī as an enemy of philosophy. Influenced by al-Ghazālī's self-representation, Renan represents him accordingly to his own readers.⁶⁷ Based on *Deliverer*, Renan concludes that al-Ghazālī embraced Sufism, which, he believed, was the most intolerant enemy of philosophy in Islam. After becoming a Sufi, al-Ghazālī set out to prove the incapacity of reason, in particular by critiquing the causal principle. For al-Ghazālī, according to Renan, laws of nature do not exist, and what is perceived as cause and effect is only a habit that exists in the human mind. This was tantamount to the negation of all scientific investigation. Al-Ghazālī, for Renan, "was one of the bizarre minds who only embraced religion as a manner to challenge reason."⁶⁸

One of the main factors behind Renan's perception of al-Ghazālī was Renan's own study of Ibn Rushd. This perception was shaped by Ibn Rushd's response to al-Ghazālī's *Destruction of the Philosophers*. Almost everything that Ibn Rushd had written was already translated into Latin long before al-Ghazālī's main works became available in the languages

⁶⁶ Griffel, "The Western Reception," 46–47.

⁶⁷ Griffel, "The Western Reception," 43.

⁶⁸ Griffel, "The Western Reception," 37.

of Europe. These older works served as the foundation of Renan's investigation of Islamic philosophy. When Renan started to read Ibn Rushd, he picked up the animosity towards al-Ghazālī which was visible in Ibn Rushd's *Destruction of the Destruction* (*The Incoherence of the Incoherence*), especially in its seventeenth discussion. According to Ibn Rushd, al-Ghazālī's denial of the causal principle was the denial of rational knowledge, since whoever denies the connection between cause and effect denies rationality. Renan interpreted the conflict between these two thinkers along the lines of the European conflict that had been going on between the Catholic Church and the rationalism of the Enlightenment. In Renan's perception, Ibn Rushd, the great commentator of Aristotle, became the representative of rationalism while al-Ghazālī, his enemy, became the representative of the official church in Islam.⁶⁹

In the first part of the twentieth century, Ignaz Goldziher expressed similar ideas in a widely read article.⁷⁰ According to him, what was adopted from Hellenistic literature was designated as the "sciences of the ancients" (*'ulūm al-awā'il*) or the "ancient sciences" (*al-'ulūm al-qadīmah*) in Muslim literature. These sciences included the entire Greek encyclopedia, covering physics, metaphysics, mathematics, philosophy, medicine, astronomy, and others. Muslims distinguished them from the newer sciences (*'ulūm al-ḥadīthah*), namely from those related to religious law. Even though there was a strong interest in the "ancient sciences," strict orthodoxy always approached those interested in them with mistrust and the suspicion of heresy. What orthodoxy expected from the pious Muslims was to stay away from them because of their assumed danger to the faith. The Prophet's request from God to be protected from useless knowledge was usually voiced in conjunction with these sciences. In

⁶⁹ Griffel, "The Western Reception," 40.

⁷⁰ Ignaz Goldziher, "The Attitude of Orthodox Islam Toward the 'Ancient Sciences,'" ed. and trans. Merlin L. Swartz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 185–215.

addition to being viewed as useless, they were generally referred to as the repudiated sciences and considered as a mixture of wisdom and unbelief.⁷¹ Anyone who expressed a peculiar opinion that seemed to contradict the theological mainstream was considered to have been influenced by these sciences. Caliph Ma'mūn embraced the doctrine of the created Qur'an as the result of his comparatively limited contact with them.⁷² People who wanted to maintain their credibility camouflaged their philosophical studies under the guise of some discipline that was relatively more acceptable to the orthodoxy, such as kalām. For them at least, kalām was an authentic science with Islamic roots.⁷³ In 890, professional copyists in Baghdad took oaths not to copy the books of philosophy,⁷⁴ and during the reign of the caliph al-Mustanjid the books of Ikhwān al-Safā, Ibn Sīnā, and others were burned.⁷⁵

In Goldziher's article, al-Ghazālī again takes a prominent position in the structure of the narrative. According to Goldziher, al-Ghazālī's opinion on the matter is valuable, since he carefully studied these "ancient sciences" and was considered as an authority on the problem of their relation to religion. For al-Ghazālī, Goldziher says, introductory sciences whose results are discovered by definitive proofs and cannot be denied—such as logic and mathematics—have neither a positive nor a negative relation to religious issues. However, studying these sciences may result in unwanted circumstances. People who study these sciences generally do so because of their exact and certain nature. This admiration leads them to conclude that all the sciences of the philosophers, including metaphysics, are as certain and exact as these sciences. With this sense of certainty, when they learn that the philosophers are

⁷¹ Goldziher, "The Attitude of Orthodox Islam," 185–187.

⁷² Goldziher, "The Attitude of Orthodox Islam," 189.

⁷³ Goldziher, "The Attitude of Orthodox Islam," 190.

⁷⁴ Goldziher, "The Attitude of Orthodox Islam," 191.

⁷⁵ Goldziher, "The Attitude of Orthodox Islam," 192.

unbelievers who reject the religious law, they too fall into doubt and start to lose their respect for religion. It thus is extremely rare, this account continues, to see someone who absorbs himself in these sciences without renouncing religion and its requirements.⁷⁶

Furthermore, Goldziher adds that al-Ghazālī's neutral position regarding the introductory sciences such as mathematics and logic changes, and that in a different work he warns his readers against the mathematical sciences. Al-Ghazālī asserts that even if they do not comprise any notion dangerous to religion, people might be attracted through them to doctrines that might be dangerous to their beliefs.⁷⁷ Goldziher continues to say that al-Ghazālī took a doubtful position regarding the natural sciences as well. He held that in these sciences truth was mixed with meaningless points and right with wrong, so that one cannot decide which side to take when needed at the time of hardship.⁷⁸

Goldziher proceed to express that al-Ghazālī, who occupied a prominent position among the orthodox authorities, did not oppose to the study of logic in principle. Even though the way he presented his own studies of logic reflects some of the apprehension he felt in the presence of the representatives of traditional theology, and despite the fact that he intentionally used ambiguous titles in order to escape from the unpopular term logic (*manṭiq*), his attitude was more welcoming toward this science compared to other theologians. For him, the study of logic was a necessary condition in the pursuit of knowledge. He hoped to incorporate this science more fully into the methods followed for the acquisition of religious knowledge by trying to demonstrate its value for theological investigation. He did this by

⁷⁶ Goldziher, "The Attitude of Orthodox Islam," 194.

⁷⁷ Goldziher, "The Attitude of Orthodox Islam," 195.

⁷⁸ Goldziher, "The Attitude of Orthodox Islam," 197.

trying to deduce the laws of logic from the Qur'an, as seen in his *Qistās*, and by trying as much as possible to draw examples from the field of law, as seen in his *Mi'yar*.⁷⁹

But, according to Goldziher, one cannot take this position as al-Ghazālī's final position regarding logic. In the undetermined way that is typical of him, al-Ghazālī finally announces his reservations about the purpose of logic and its harmful influence on people's belief in religion. When a friend of al-Ghazālī requested that he write a book on logic, al-Ghazālī tells him that this request brought him back to a subject that he had already abandoned out of disgust and discontent.⁸⁰

This notion of orthodoxy versus philosophy, with al-Ghazālī on the side of orthodoxy, can also be seen in the chapter devoted to al-Ghazālī by T. J. De Boer in his book *The History of Philosophy in Islam*, which was published in 1901.⁸¹ While De Boer seems sympathetic to al-Ghazālī's life and work and praises him as the most remarkable figure in all Islam,⁸² his admiration nevertheless operates inside the framework laid out by Renan. According to De Boer, besides the dialectical attempts to make faith more intelligible and provide a rational basis for it, there were also mystical movements that leaned towards the concept of dogma. These mystical movements intended not to comprehend or demonstrate the details of faith, but to grasp them through spiritual exercise and experience. For them, the only way to discard the doubts of soul was to build religion on an inner foundation beyond the limits of reason. For De Boer, al-Ghazālī was one of the proponents of this movement. De Boer states that, "ever since his time, Mysticism both sustains and crowns the Temple of Learning in Orthodox

⁷⁹ Goldziher, "The Attitude of Orthodox Islam," 201–202.

⁸⁰ Goldziher, "The Attitude of Orthodox Islam," 203.

⁸¹ T. J. De Boer, *The History of Philosophy in Islam*, trans. Edward R. Jones (Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1983), 154–168.

⁸² De Boer, *The History of Philosophy*, 168.

Islam.”⁸³ Renan’s hostility towards mysticism is not visible in De Boer’s account, but he still treats the mysticism al-Ghazālī supposedly represents as a trend of thought in opposition to philosophy. This representation, again, is based on *Deliverer from Error*, an autobiographical work in which al-Ghazālī tailors the historical context of the events of his life in order to make them more tolerable to those in his immediate surroundings.

De Boer reports that the theological movement in Islam had been engaging with philosophy, and there had been several attempts to refute some particular aspects of philosophy or some individual philosophers before the coming of al-Ghazālī. After studying philosophy thoroughly, al-Ghazālī became the first person to direct an attack against the entire philosophical system, which had been built on a Greek foundation.⁸⁴ He recognized the legitimacy of the mathematical sciences and accepted the validity of physics and astronomy. However, the philosophy of Aristotle as taught by al-Fārābī (339/950) and Ibn Sīnā in the Muslim world seemed to him as the enemy of Islam, and “in the name of all the Muslim schools and tendencies of thought together, he feels bound to do battle with it, as from a catholic standpoint.”⁸⁵

In order to exemplify al-Ghazālī’s enmity towards philosophy, De Boer as well returns to al-Ghazālī’s *Destruction of the Philosophers*. He focuses especially on three matters on the basis of which al-Ghazālī labels the Muslim philosophers as apostates: 1) the eternity of the world; 2) God’s knowledge of particulars; and 3) the resurrection of the body in the afterlife.⁸⁶ He does not make any comments about the seventeenth discussion of the book.

⁸³ De Boer, *The History of Philosophy*, 155.

⁸⁴ De Boer, *The History of Philosophy*, 154.

⁸⁵ De Boer, *The History of Philosophy*, 158–159.

⁸⁶ De Boer, *The History of Philosophy*, 159.

When he was talking about al-Ghazālī's early relation to philosophy, De Boer tells his readers that al-Ghazālī composed his *Compendium of Philosophy* (*Maqāṣid al-Falāsifah*) following the system of Ibn Sīnā. At this point, he inserts into the text a very strange sentence regarding this book, which implies a different perspective about al-Ghazālī's relation with philosophy. De Boer says that "He (al-Ghazālī) said, –at first in a kind of whisper to pacify his own mind, but publicly in self defense– that he composed that work in order that he might follow up the statement of the doctrines of the philosophy with the refutation of the same."⁸⁷ What one might infer from this sentence is that, at first, al-Ghazālī's intention with the study of philosophy was not to refute it, but something else. De Boer is also aware of the fact that in the Muslim west, al-Ghazālī was received as a heretical innovator because of his appropriation of philosophy in his works.⁸⁸ As will be seen later on, the revisionist approach builds its arguments on similar facts. Nevertheless, De Boer does not follow this path in his treatment of al-Ghazālī, and prefers to stay close to the contemporary understanding.

De Boer finds the frequently repeated notion that al-Ghazālī has annihilated philosophy in Islam completely mistaken and asserts that it does not rely on historical evidence. However, his attitude about the fate of Islamic philosophy is not so much different from the general attitude. The idea of decline in Islamic philosophy is evident between the lines of his account. For him, philosophy continued to be studied for a long time after al-Ghazālī, but it never again managed to secure for itself a position of prominence. Thus, in comparison with earlier times, it began to decline. The quality of the people who occupied themselves with the study of philosophy also decreased in comparison with earlier periods. After Ibn Sīnā, no one generated independent views. Literary production was reduced to mere

⁸⁷ De Boer, *The History of Philosophy*, 156.

⁸⁸ De Boer, *The History of Philosophy*, 164.

“abridgements, commentaries, glosses, and glosses upon glosses.”⁸⁹ The difference between De Boer and his predecessors is that he attributes this decline mostly to the political situation and a lack of freedom. For him, after this time there were no more enlightened despots to guarantee and protect the freedom philosophers require in the exercise of their profession.⁹⁰

Another scholar who employs the framework put forward by Renan is De Lacy O’Leary, especially in his 1922 book *Arabic Thought and Its Place in History*.⁹¹ The very layout of the book indicates that its author conceives of Islamic philosophy’s role as that of a transmitter. This general assumption is neatly summarized in a concluding paragraph.⁹² There, the author asserts that a particular kind of Hellenic culture—inherited by the Syrian church, the Zoroastrians of Persia, and the pagans of Harran—finds its way into Arabic via the pens of translators during the Abbasid era. As the result of these translations, a new type of scholar emerges under the patronage of those whom the ordinary Muslims regard as heretics in the Eastern part of the Muslim world. Despite the opposition these new scholars face from orthodox quarters, they leave a distinct and lasting impression on Muslim theology and beliefs. After a turbulent history in the Eastern part of the Muslim world, this culture moves to the Western part. In the Muslim west, it makes a deeper impression on Christians and Jews than on Muslims, and from there it moves on into Europe. It actualizes its full potential in North-East Italy as an anti-ecclesiastical force, and prepares the way for the Renaissance.

In O’Leary’s account of cultural transmission, the concept of orthodoxy plays a very important role. Again, this concept is used as an explanatory device for the disappearance of

⁸⁹ De Boer, *The History of Philosophy*, 169–170.

⁹⁰ De Boer, *The History of Philosophy*, 169.

⁹¹ De Lacy O’Leary, *Arabic Thought and Its Place in History* (London: Kegan Paul, 1939), revised edition.

⁹² O’Leary, *Arabic Thought*, 295.

philosophy from the Muslim world. The degree to which orthodoxy was present determined the ups and downs of philosophy during the early period; it forced philosophy to move to the Western part of the Muslim world, and finally to Europe. O’Leary devotes an entire chapter to the formation of an orthodox scholasticism within “the Muslim church” since, according to him, such a development influenced the transmission of Arabic thought to Latin Christendom. The major figure O’Leary deals with in his chapter on Orthodox Scholasticism⁹³ is al-Ghazālī. In the chapter, he outlines the doctrines of al-Ash’arī (324/935-936) and al-Baqillanī (403/1013) to provide background information for al-Ghazālī’s thought.

According to O’Leary, the system of orthodox scholasticism came into existence as the result of efforts to overcome the difficulties raised by philosophy.⁹⁴ These difficulties were denoted as heretical innovations (*bid‘ah*) in the terminology of the practitioners of this method, and their aim was to preserve the purity of orthodox belief from these innovations. In this system of thought, for which O’Leary employs the term *kalam*, the methods of philosophy were commonly utilized, but its fundamental tenets were derived from revelation, a characteristic which makes it very similar to the scholastic theology of Latin Christendom. Al-Ash’arī was the first representative of the earlier phases of this movement,⁹⁵ and he is important as the founder of this school of orthodox scholasticism. However, he did not leave a complete system of thought, and the school he created was fully developed by al-Baqillanī into a coherent system.⁹⁶ The school’s influence became more widespread with its popularization by al-Ghazālī in the East.⁹⁷

⁹³ O’Leary, *Arabic Thought*, 208–225.

⁹⁴ O’Leary, *Arabic Thought*, 217.

⁹⁵ O’Leary, *Arabic Thought*, 211.

⁹⁶ O’Leary, *Arabic Thought*, 212.

⁹⁷ O’Leary, *Arabic Thought*, 217.

O'Leary declares that al-Ghazālī thinks of Aristotle and his Arabic commentators as unbelievers who rely on a system of thought that contains grave errors and inevitable difficulties, and because of these errors and difficulties people are not to be encouraged to study philosophy or learn about its doctrine.⁹⁸

As in the account of Renan, al-Ghazālī's mysticism becomes a very important part of the narration in O'Leary as well. He asserts that al-Ghazālī, in opposing the position of the philosophers with the claim that the truth can be attained only by revelation, at the same time appears as the transmitter of the mystical teachings of the Sufis into orthodox Islam. For al-Ghazālī, O'Leary claims, the ultimate truth of revelation can be confirmed and certified only by individual experience, and mysticism provides the instructions for its attainment. Similar to the teachings of mysticism, al-Ghazālī also asserts that there are three worlds or modes of existence that are not separate in time or space: the world of sense perception (*'alam al-mulk*), the world of eternal reality (*'alam al-malakūt*), and the world in between (*'alam al-jabarūt*). Human beings spend their corporeal lives in the world of perception, and desire to reach the eternal reality where the ultimate truth exists. The entity that belongs to this realm is the soul, and it represents the world in between. The highest mode of existence cannot be attained by reason or intellect, since these faculties belong to the world of sense perception. But it can be attained by the activation of the spiritual faculty through which the soul can be raised to the world of eternal reality. Reality discloses itself when the soul reaches this level of existence. This phenomenon is known generally as revelation. Not only is religious knowledge the product of revelation, but it is also the main substance of sciences like medicine and astronomy, which the philosophers claim to be the product of their investigation.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ O'Leary, *Arabic Thought*, 221.

⁹⁹ O'Leary, *Arabic Thought*, 222–223.

At this point of the argument, O’Leary compares al-Ghazālī with Ibn Rushd claiming that unlike Ibn Rushd, al-Ghazālī emphasizes “supra-rational intuition attained in a state of ecstasy.” For him, this is pure mysticism. By doing so, al-Ghazālī inserts the elements of Sufism into orthodox Islam.¹⁰⁰ This is the final phase of the development of orthodoxy in the Muslim world, and al-Ghazālī’s thought signifies the completion of its systematical frame. After this point, this system does not account for any form of originality, and exhibits the widespread signs of decadence. Day by day, with the increase of this decadence, Muslim life and thought largely fell into the iron hands of rigid conservatism.¹⁰¹

From these examples, it can be understood that during the earlier stages of Islamic studies in the West, al-Ghazālī was perceived as the archenemy of philosophy in Islam and presented accordingly to a wider audience. The overriding reason for this presentation was that the general worldview of the scholars of the era had been deeply influenced by the conflict between scholasticism and the rationalist movements of the Renaissance, and they projected this binary opposition onto their subject of investigation.¹⁰² The information derived from the existing translations of his works, especially from *Deliverer from Error* and *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, and from the works of his enemy, Ibn Rushd, made al-Ghazālī a perfect figure to situate into this narration as an explanatory device. But, with the increasing availability of his works in European languages, this perception of al-Ghazālī started to become the subject of growing suspicion and doubt, and a new phase began to appear in studies on al-Ghazālī regarding his relationship with philosophy. This new perception reflects the change in the general opinion about the fate of Islamic philosophy.

1.3 Encounter with *The Niche of Lights* and “the Ghazālī Problem”

¹⁰⁰ O’Leary, *Arabic Thought*, 223.

¹⁰¹ O’Leary, *Arabic Thought*, 224.

¹⁰² Griffel, “The Western Reception,” 39–40.

The notion of al-Ghazālī's commitment and contribution to orthodox Islam against philosophy was mostly derived from two of his books, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers* and *Deliverer from Error*. Based on these works, it is natural for the reader to draw the conclusions that al-Ghazālī was a ferocious enemy of the philosophical currents that had been flowing into the mainstream in the Islamic world and that he felt, in the name of Islam, responsible for the protection of the Muslim creed. After presenting his objections to philosophers throughout *Incoherence* in twenty discussions, at the end of the book he openly pronounces the philosophers to be infidels who believe in the eternity of the world, in the universality of God's knowledge, and in the impossibility of bodily resurrection. These three points constitute three of the book's twenty discussions. For the rest of the problems discussed in the book, that is to say seventeen, he declares the philosophers to be heretical innovators.¹⁰³ He repeats his accusations again in the related section of *Deliverer* where he narrates his confrontation with philosophy and its results.¹⁰⁴

The third discussion of *Incoherence* is about the nature of God as the creator of the universe. In this discussion, al-Ghazālī deals with the theory of emanation, which is the cosmological theory of the philosophers, and asserts that with the acceptance of this theory, God's creative nature is reduced to a degree that is not acceptable according to the Muslim creed. For him, their saying that God is the maker and enactor of the world is a cloak (*talbīs*) that covers their true intention. This is because they are aware of the fact that the theory of emanation implies a different God than the God of Islam.¹⁰⁵ After elucidating it from the

¹⁰³ Al-Ghazālī, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers: Tahāfut al-Falāsifah*, trans. Michael E. Marmura (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1997), 230.

¹⁰⁴ Al-Ghazālī, Abu Ḥāmid Muḥammad b. Muḥammad, *al-Munqidh min al-Ḍalāl* in *Majmū'at Rasā'il al-Imām al-Ghazālī*, v. 7, ed. Aḥmad Shams al-Din (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1997), 34–47; particularly 42.

¹⁰⁵ Al-Ghazālī, *Incoherence*, 56.

mouth of his opponents,¹⁰⁶ al-Ghazālī mocks the theory, saying that what is “mentioned are arbitrary assertions which, when truly ascertained, constitute nothing but darkness atop darkness. If a human were to relate this as something seen in sleep; one would infer from it the illness of his temperament, or if its kind were brought about in legal matters, where the most one hope for is conjecture, it would be said that these are trifles that bestow no likely suppositions.”¹⁰⁷

This conviction of al-Ghazālī as expressed in *Incoherence* about the theory of emanation began to be questioned with the publication of his book *The Niche of Lights* (*Mishkāt al-Anwār*) in Arabic in 1904. This book can be considered a late arrival within the major works of al-Ghazālī in terms of its recognition on the part of Western scholars.¹⁰⁸ The *Niche* is a discourse on the meaning of the word “light” (*nūr*) in respect to the famous light verse of the Qur’ān (24:35), and a certain tradition (*ḥadīth*) about the seventy (or seventy thousand) veils of God.¹⁰⁹ It is divided into three parts. In the first part, al-Ghazālī deals with the meaning of light, with its physical and metaphysical connotations. In the second part, he lays the groundwork for the symbolic exegesis of the light verse. In the third part, which has become a source of debate since its publication, he applies this symbolic exegesis to the verse and the tradition. In particular, the problem seems to lie in the part where he elucidates the veil tradition.

¹⁰⁶ Al-Ghazālī, *Incoherence*, 67–69.

¹⁰⁷ Al-Ghazālī, *Incoherence*, 69.

¹⁰⁸ Griffel, “The Western Reception,” 47.

¹⁰⁹ “Allah hath Seventy Thousand Veils of Light and Darkness: were He to withdraw their curtain, then would the splendors of His Aspect (or Countenance) surely consume everyone who apprehended Him with his sight.” Al-Ghazālī, *The Niche for Lights: al-Ghazālī’s Mishkāt al-Anwār*, trans. W. H. T. Gairdner (New Delhi: Kitab Bhavan, 1991), 43.

Ten years after its publication, in 1914, W. H. T. Gairdner published an article juxtaposing the problems resulting from the ideas expressed in the third part of the book. The problems he identified seemed to be in discord with the generally accepted opinion about al-Ghazālī regarding his relation to philosophy in general and to the theory of emanation in particular.¹¹⁰ The ideas expressed in the concluding part of this book seem to be in contradiction with the remarks he made in *Incoherence*.

In the third part, al-Ghazālī at first identifies the veils as two in principle: light veils and dark veils. Then, he divides people into three main categories based on the nature of the veil with which they are covered. These are: a) those who are veiled by pure darkness, b) those who are veiled by the mixture of dark and light, and c) those who are veiled by pure light. Beyond these three groups, there are those whose veils have been taken away completely. They constitute the fourth group and are called the attainers (*al-wāsilūn*). Almost¹¹¹ all of the groups in this categorization actually look for a cause to explain existence in general, but deviation from the path in the process blocks them from attaining the higher level. The more deviation occurs, the less light they receive.

Al-Ghazālī further divides those who are veiled by pure light into three classes. The first class, which is the lowest in this category, understands that the attributes of God—such as word, will, power, and knowledge—are different from the characterization of human beings with these attributes. They avoid defining God with these expressions, and they say that God is the mover and orderer of the heavens.¹¹² The second class goes higher than the

¹¹⁰ W. H. T. Gairdner, “al-Ghazālī’s *Mishkāt al-Anwār* and the Ghazālī Problem,” *Der Islam*, 5, 1914, 121–153.

¹¹¹ Some in the group veiled by pure darkness do not make such an enquiry. They simply follow the desires of their “self.” Al-Ghazālī, *The Niche for Lights*, 89.

¹¹² “*Muḥarrik al-samawāt wa mudabbiru-hā*” al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt al-Anwār* in *Majmū’at Rasā’il al-Imām al-Ghazālī*, v. 4, 45.

first one and perceives that there are several heavens and each heaven is moved by a specific angel. They see that the heavens are enveloped by another sphere, and God's action is limited to moving of this outermost heaven.¹¹³ Thus they maintain the unity of God better than the first class. The third class accepts the whole arrangement of the spheres and their angelic movers, but instead of identifying God as the mover of the outermost sphere, they ascribe this job to a supreme angel who acts directly in obedience to the command of the Lord of the Worlds. Thus they understand God as the universal mover who moves indirectly and by way of command (*amr*) only.¹¹⁴ Beyond these three class there is the forth class of attainers, who transcend "all that is comprehensible by human sight or human insight; for they found it [God] transcendent of and separate from every [other] characterization."¹¹⁵

Gairdner understands from the book that the nature of al-Ghazālī's involvement with philosophical ideas in the *Niche* is milder than what has been seen from his other books. It seems that al-Ghazālī softens the hard line between apostasy (*kufr*) and belief (*īmān*), and the fierce dogmatism he displays in his other writings is completely absent in the *Niche*.¹¹⁶ He also finds it puzzling that the arrangement of the heavenly spheres—reminiscent of the theory of emanation—is used by al-Ghazālī as a measure stick to differentiate the classes of those who are veiled by pure light. The theory al-Ghazālī applies to account for the highest division

¹¹³ "al-Rabb huwa al-muḥarrikli al-jirm al-aqṣā al-muḥtawī 'alā al-aflāk kulli-hā." Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt al-Anwār*, 45.

¹¹⁴ "anna al-Rabb huwa al-muṭā' min jihat hadha al-muḥarrik, wa yakūn al-Rabb ta'ālā wajada muḥarrikan li al-kull bi-ṭarīq al-amr lā bi-ṭarīq al-mubāsharah." Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt al-Anwār*, 45.

¹¹⁵ Al-Ghazālī, *The Niche For Lights*, 96. "waṣalū ilā mawjūd munazzah 'an kull mā adrakahu baṣar al-nāẓirīn wa baṣīratuhum idh wajadūhu munazzahan wa muqaddasan 'an jamī' mā waṣafnāhu." Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt al-Anwār*, 45; Al-Ghazālī, *The Niche For Lights*, 95-96; Gairdner, "al-Ghazālī's *Mishkāt al-Anwār*," 126-129.

¹¹⁶ Gairdner, "al-Ghazālī's *Mishkāt al-Anwār*," 129.

in this book was the source of the most important dispute¹¹⁷ in the days of *Incoherence*. Gairdner infers that al-Ghazālī's mystic experiences, meditations, and long observations of the sky during the night caused him to modify his opinion about the structure of the universe and God's relation with it.¹¹⁸

Another issue that strikes Gairdner as strange is that al-Ghazālī assigns a relatively low level to the early Ash'arites and the theologians (*mutakallimūn*). He places them in the group of those who are veiled by the mixture of dark and light. Gairdner asserts that al-Ghazālī's obvious dislike and suspicion of *kalām* reaches its highest level in this book. According to him, al-Ghazālī thinks that the neat formulas of this science cover the soul with the veil of darkness.¹¹⁹ With the deductions he made from the *Niche*, Gairdner opens the way for doubts about al-Ghazālī's loyalty to orthodox Islam, and to the occasionalist principles of the orthodox theologians.

According to occasionalism, God creates and controls every detail of his creation in every moment all by himself. Everything that is created in time comes into existence spontaneously, immediately, and solely by the will of God. There is no reason or necessary cause other than his will. He is the only cause for all the creatures and events in the universe. Nothing other than him has any effect on other things. Things might seem to be connected to each other by casual efficacy or some casual laws, but God does not act according to such laws since they would mean a limitation on his power and will. Because it goes against the belief in the immediate involvement of God in every detail, the occasionalist principle rejects the notion that things in the created world act mandatorily with the force of their own nature

¹¹⁷ Gairdner thinks that the third discussion of *Incoherence* is vitally connected with the other discussions in which al-Ghazālī labels the philosophers as apostates; "al-Ghazālī's *Mishkāt al-Anwār*," 138.

¹¹⁸ Gairdner, "al-Ghazālī's *Mishkāt al-Anwār*," 131–132.

¹¹⁹ Gairdner, "al-Ghazālī's *Mishkāt al-Anwār*," 129–130.

in order to actualize their unrealized potentialities. Therefore, there is neither any casual connection nor any laws of nature in the occasionalist account of the universe.¹²⁰ Gairdner had thought that al-Ghazālī of *Deliverer* was in agreement with these principles.¹²¹

The veil section of *Niche*, however, led Gairdner to doubt al-Ghazālī's commitment to occasionalism. All the classes in the veil section seem to accept a different arrangement of the structure of the universe than the one offered by occasionalism. But the arrangement appears most clearly at the highest level. Those who are unveiled view God as removed from any kind of activity. For them, he does not even give the order for the movements of heavens. The actions are assigned to other beings below God. The unveiled assume that below God there is the one who gives the order to the vicegerents, and that they act accordingly. Gairdner asserts that at this point not only God is denied as the immediate efficient cause of motion but also as the giver of command for the first motion.¹²²

Frank Griffel identifies this arrangement as the cosmological theory of the philosophers, of which secondary causes constitute the most important part. According to this theory, the whole universe consists of ten spheres wrapped around each other in a way that resembles the structure of an onion. The lowest one, which is also at the center, is the sublunar world of ours, and the other nine are the heavenly spheres with their own material body and soul. Every sphere has an intellect that dominates its soul, and the soul causes the movement in its material. The intellect that dominates the highest sphere is the highest created being of this structure. Beyond the highest intellect, there is the being that is the cause of all.

¹²⁰ For a detailed explanation of occasionalism, see Frank Griffel, *al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 124–127.

¹²¹ Gairdner, "al-Ghazālī's *Mishkāt al-Anwār*," 143. Gairdner refers to al-Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh min al-Ḍalāl*, in *Majmū'at Rasā'il Imām al-Ghazālī*, v. 7, 42.

¹²² Gairdner, "al-Ghazālī's *Mishkāt al-Anwār*," 128; Griffel, "The Western Reception," 48.

The philosophers call this being the first principle, and they equate it with God. In this structure, God does not create immediately, but he mediates his activity to the lowest level through a long chain of secondary causes. The existence of the secondary causes in the process of creation contradicts the notion of God as the immediate cause of everything in the occasionalist model.¹²³

Although he thinks that al-Ghazālī stands exonerated against the accusation of Ibn Rushd,¹²⁴ Gairdner is aware of the problem of contradiction in al-Ghazālī's works. As a solution to this apparent contradiction, he offers the idea that if al-Ghazālī advocates these contradictory models in his various works, then he must have different sets of teaching for different kinds of people: an exoteric teaching for the pious *'awāmm* and an esoteric teaching for the educated *khawāṣṣ*.¹²⁵ This solution is based on a confusing remark al-Ghazālī makes in the *Niche*. While stating the position of the unveiled, al-Ghazālī suddenly finishes the discussion with these words: "because of a mystery the disclosure of this book does not admit of."¹²⁶ From this remark, Gairdner infers that there must be another work or works in which

¹²³ Griffel, "The Western Reception," 49.

¹²⁴ Gairdner asks the question previously: "Was Ibn Rushd justified in his gloss in the *M.*(*Mishkāt*) passage, namely that Allah was *huwa-lladhī ṣadara 'anhu hādha-l-muḥarrik*(called *al-muṭā'*), and that Gh.'s language in this passage amounts to a *tasrīḥ minhu bi 'tiqādi madhābi-l-falāsifah?*", "al-Ghazālī's *Mishkāt al-Anwār*," 137. Translation of Ibn Rushd remarks is: "This is a clear admission on his part of subscribing to the doctrines of the philosophers in the metaphysical sciences." Averroes, *Faith and Reason in Islam: Averroes' Exposition of Religious Arguments*, trans. Ibrahim Y. Najjar (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2001), 69. See also; Ibn Rushd, *al-Kashf 'an Manāḥij al-Adillah fī 'Aqā'id al-Millāh* (Beirut: Markaz Dirāsāt al-Waḥdah al-'Arabiyah, 1997), 151. Here *al-falāsifah* changes with *al-ḥukamā'*.

¹²⁵ Gairdner, "al-Ghazālī's *Mishkāt al-Anwār*," 153.

¹²⁶ Gairdner, "al-Ghazālī's *Mishkāt al-Anwār*," 132. The Arabic expression Gairdner gives is this: "*li-sirr lā yaḥtamil hādha al-kitāb kashfah*." He changes the expression slightly in his translation of the book: "on account

al-Ghazālī reveals his real convictions to his special readers. In order to support this claim, Gairdner turns to the fact that for al-Ghazālī, as he expressed at the end of his *Mizān al-ʿAmal*, every perfect man (*kāmil*) has three sets of opinions (*madhāhib*): first, one for the people among whom he is born and raised; second, for the people whom he engages in a scholarly occupation based on their degree of intellect and perception; and third, one that he keeps between God and himself.¹²⁷

Gairdner is aware of the fact that accepting al-Ghazālī as the contributor of two different sets of teaching creates another problem, and accordingly, at the end of the article, he admits that the Ghazālī problem is not finished yet. He asks whether, if there are two different sets of the teachings of al-Ghazālī, it is possible to know which one of them represents his view of the absolute truth of Islam. If he sees both of them as equally true, does he advocate the notion of double truth? Gairdner thinks that these questions may never be solved, and he is certain that they will trouble the scholars of al-Ghazālī for a long time.¹²⁸

1.4 Denying the Text: Debating the Authenticity of the Philosophical Content

In 1949, William M. Watt offered a solution for the Ghazālī problem in his article “A Forgery in al-Ghazālī’s *Mishkāt*?”¹²⁹ Watt agrees with Gairdner about the difficulties originating from the last section of *Niche (Mishkāt)*, and states that there are many statements in this section that apparently contradict al-Ghazālī’s general position. However, he goes

of a mystery which it is not in the scope of this book to reveal.” Al-Ghazālī, *The Niche for Lights*, 96. See also *Mishkāt al-Anwār* in *Majmūat Rasā’il*, v. 4, 45. Here *lā* changes with *laysa*.

¹²⁷ Gairdner, “al-Ghazālī’s *Mishkāt al-Anwār*,” 147; al-Ghazālī, *Mizān al-ʿAmal*, Misr: Maktabat al-Jundī, ed. Muḥammad Mustafā Abū al-ʿAlā, 172.

¹²⁸ Gairdner, “al-Ghazālī’s *Mishkāt al-Anwār*,” 153.

¹²⁹ Willam M. Watt, “A Forgery in al-Ghazālī’s *Mishkāt*?” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, no 1 (April, 1949), 5–22.

further than this when he states the argument of his article. He boldly asserts that “the contradiction amounts to incompatibility and is not apparent but real and that therefore the Veils-section is not the work of al-Ghazālī but a forgery either completing a work dealing only with the Light-verse or else substituted for the genuine Ghazalian interpretation of the Veils-tradition.”¹³⁰ Since it is possible that an author’s views might develop and change over the course of his career, Watt concedes that the contradictions between *Niche* and the other works of al-Ghazālī do not alone mean that it is a forgery. In order to prove his argument, he argues that the Veils-section is internally contradictory with the other sections of *Niche* and that on the basis of this inconsistency “it can be shown conclusively that the Veils-section is incompatible with the rest of *Niche*.”¹³¹

According to Watt, a) the doctrine of the attributes of the Veils-section was contradictory to what was found both elsewhere in the book itself and in the other works of al-Ghazālī in general;¹³² b) in the veil section, al-Ghazālī never mentioned prophethood or the prophetic spirit, even though they are one of the central themes of his thought;¹³³ and c) as the initial two chapters of the book are coherent parts of a carefully constructed composition, the veil section seems to follow without any connection to the other chapters.¹³⁴

Watt argues that if the authenticity of the veil section were to be accepted, al-Ghazālī could have been labeled as sympathetic to Neoplatonic philosophers like al-Fārābī and Ibn

¹³⁰ Watt, “A Forgery,” 5.

¹³¹ Watt, “A Forgery,” 6.

¹³² Watt, “A Forgery,” 6–9.

¹³³ Watt, “A Forgery,” 9–11.

¹³⁴ Watt, “A Forgery,” 11–14.

Sīnā. However, his whole corpus proves otherwise, since he never ceased to oppose them through the end of his life.¹³⁵

Watt continues to argue that those who want to accept the authenticity of the veil section try to solve the apparent contradiction of al-Ghazālī by claiming that he held esoteric and exoteric teachings at the same time. He tells us that in order to support this claim they usually quote the last part of *Mīzān al-‘Amal* in which al-Ghazālī states that every man has three sets of teachings: one for the commoners, a second for the educated, and a third between himself and God. However this may be, Watt asserts, the context of the passage from *Mīzān* does not suggest their interpretation. He goes on to quote the whole passage in order to prove his point and afterwards provides his own interpretation.¹³⁶ Even though he seems to be on firmer ground regarding the passage from *Mīzān*, the denial of al-Ghazālī’s esotericism based on this passage hardly proves that the Veils-section of *Niche* is a forgery.

In a later article of broader scope,¹³⁷ Watt justifies his reasoning with the assumption that people of unorthodox opinions might attribute their own works to an author, like al-Ghazālī, with an unimpeachable reputation in order to escape censorship and secure a wider audience.¹³⁸ The question at hand seems to be the problem of al-Ghazālī’s change of attitude towards Neoplatonism during the last years of his life. For Watt, if the Neoplatonic passages that are attributed to al-Ghazālī can be proved to be unauthentic, then the charges that he changed his attitude and wrote inconsistently will be dropped.¹³⁹ Watt confesses that he was

¹³⁵ Watt, “A Forgery,” 14.

¹³⁶ Watt, “A Forgery,” 18–21.

¹³⁷ William M. Watt, “The Authenticity of the Works Attributed to al-Ghazālī,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, no 1/2 (April, 1952), 24–45.

¹³⁸ Watt, “The Authenticity of Works,” 24.

¹³⁹ Watt, “The Authenticity of Works,” 25.

not able to examine all of the chief manuscripts and printed editions of al-Ghazālī's work, so to prove his argument he sets out three general principles to apply to al-Ghazālī's works. First, to have a solid ground for al-Ghazālī and his thought, one must base his opinion on those works of his whose authenticity is clear, such as *Incoherence*, *Revival*, and *Deliverer*.¹⁴⁰ Second, since al-Ghazālī's authentic works are composed in an orderly and logical fashion, works that lack these features must be doubted.¹⁴¹ Third, since al-Ghazālī in his authentic works anxiously desires to be regarded as orthodox, the works that contradict this desire must be doubted.¹⁴² Watt's argument, however, is based on the assumption of al-Ghazālī's orthodoxy, and his general principles do not help to prove the argument but rather to confirm the assumption.

Watt disregards the deductions of Gairdner regarding al-Ghazālī's adherence to philosophy and his esotericism. Later on, Watt's view seems to be taken up by Hava Lazarus-Yafeh as well.¹⁴³ She proposes another principle for the process of evaluation, this time derived from the language al-Ghazālī uses. Yafeh argues that common mediaeval philosophical terms are completely absent from those of al-Ghazālī's books which are commonly accepted as authentic. The exception are the books in which al-Ghazālī intends to describe or refute philosophical ideas such as *Intentions* and *Incoherence*.¹⁴⁴ However, the books of contested authenticity, including *al-Risālah al-Ladunniyah*, *al-Maḍnūn al-Saghīr*,

¹⁴⁰ Watt, "The Authenticity of Works," 26.

¹⁴¹ Watt, "The Authenticity of Works," 28.

¹⁴² Watt, "The Authenticity of Works," 29.

¹⁴³ Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, *Studies in Al-Ghazzali*, (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press of the Hebrew University, 1975), 249–259.

¹⁴⁴ Lazarus-Yafeh, *Studies in al-Ghazzali*, 249.

and *Ma'ārij al-Quds*, include mediaeval philosophical terminology.¹⁴⁵ Because none of them, for her, offer a suitable standard or sufficient depth nobody can argue that these books belong to al-Ghazālī and they reveal his esoteric teaching. But, she claims, it is highly possible to show that these books are only compilations of various passages, copied from both al-Ghazzālī's authentic books and from the writings of philosophers such as Ibn Sīnā and others.¹⁴⁶

For Lazarus-Yafeh, even though al-Ghazālī went through profound changes in his life and thought, his language stayed surprisingly consistent from the beginning to the end of his career. She says "Whenever the common philosophical terminology is found in one of al-Ghazzālī's books, the authenticity of which has already been doubted and contested, that book should be considered as spurious."¹⁴⁷

Like Montgomery Watt, Lazarus-Yafeh tries to justify the assumption of forgery with the judgment that the attribution of books to the famous authors was a widespread practice in medieval times to secure their survival. This practice might have been used to discredit opponents as well.¹⁴⁸ The same might have happened to al-Ghazālī. In his case, the forgers were sympathetic to philosophy, and the intention usually was not to discredit al-Ghazālī but to disseminate philosophy with the help of his fame.¹⁴⁹ Like Watt, she also concludes that the elimination of spurious books will lead the research towards a better understanding of al-

¹⁴⁵ Lazarus-Yafeh, *Studies in al-Ghazzālī*, 251.

¹⁴⁶ Lazarus-Yafeh, *Studies in al-Ghazzālī*, 252.

¹⁴⁷ Lazarus-Yafeh, *Studies in al-Ghazzālī*, 255.

¹⁴⁸ Lazarus-Yafeh, *Studies in al-Ghazzālī*, 256.

¹⁴⁹ Lazarus-Yafeh, *Studies in al-Ghazzālī*, 257.

Ghazālī and his thought.¹⁵⁰ But, from the conclusion she draws, the al-Ghazālī she refers to is one who maintained a firm loyalty to orthodox Islam throughout his lifetime.

From Lazarus-Yafeh's treatment of the subject, it is possible to say that like Renan's theory about al-Ghazālī's supra-rationally and mystically based enmity towards rational and scientific investigation, Montgomery Watt's theory of forgery has also been taken seriously for several decades. Both theories are based on the partial investigation of al-Ghazālī's works. Renan based his theoretical framework primarily on the seventeenth discussion of *Incoherence*; and Watt simply assumed the works with philosophical content to have been forged, without providing a method of research.

It will be seen later that a revisionist approach has been strongly challenging the theory of Renan; and for Watt, Frank Griffel firmly opposes his position by asserting that our current knowledge about the scholarly tradition of Muslims regarding the production and distribution of texts in the pre-modern era does not allow us to entertain such possibilities anymore.¹⁵¹ One aspect of these new challenges results from the reexamination of *Incoherence* in general, and al-Ghazālī's stance towards the laws of nature and the theory of casual connection in the seventeenth discussion of the book in particular.

1.5 The Objective of *The Incoherence of Philosophers*

The notion of al-Ghazālī's opposition to causality has mostly been derived from *Destruction*, in particular from its seventeenth discussion. Early evaluations of the book and the seventeenth discussion have resulted in the assumption that al-Ghazālī completely rejected the casual principle in the physical world. By doing so, he blocked the way for scientific investigation. Another factor that contributed to this notion is the assumption of al-Ghazālī's

¹⁵⁰ Lazarus-Yafeh, *Studies in al-Ghazzali*, 258.

¹⁵¹ Griffel, "The Western Reception," 52.

loyalty to Ash‘arism and to the occasionalist nature of their cosmology. However, recent evaluations of the subject seem to be offering some modifications to this perception and reshaping the opinion about al-Ghazālī’s stance regarding this subject.

According to this new perception, the supposition of al-Ghazālī’s opposition to Aristotelianism and to its teachings is a misconception resulting from the overestimation of his criticism of the teachings of the philosophers. Al-Ghazālī’s intention with the criticism is not to show that their teachings are wrong, but to show that they are not supported by their own standard which is demonstration by *burhān*, the apodictic proof. But showing that they are not supported by *burhān* is not the same thing as showing that they are wrong. This might mean that the upholder of the objection might still hold the conviction of their correctness. This was the most likely case for al-Ghazālī, since he used the philosophical doctrines which he seemed to oppose in *Incoherence* in many of his other works. In fact, a close examination of *Incoherence* actually reveals that al-Ghazālī directs his objections mainly to the arguments of the philosophers and not to their results. So, one of the points he wants to make with the publication of *Incoherence* is to show his readers that the conclusions of the philosophers are not, as they claim, the product of their logical reasoning, but are rather borrowings from another source of knowledge which, according to al-Ghazālī, is revelation.¹⁵²

Al-Ghazālī usually expresses his method and objective clearly at the beginning of his books. *Incoherence* is not an exception to this habit. Before delving into the twenty issues he sets out to refute, al-Ghazālī clarifies the method he employs and the objective he wants to achieve in four relatively short but concise introductions. Besides this, a religious

¹⁵² Griffel, *al-Ghazālī’s Philosophical Theology*, 98–101.

introduction¹⁵³ precedes these four introductions. The religious introduction as well contains valuable information about the objective of the book.

In the religious introduction, al-Ghazālī describes a group of people who completely disregard the commands and prohibitions of religion based on the belief of their own intellectual distinctiveness. They obtain their sense of distinctiveness from the fact that they are the followers of Socrates, Hippocrates, Plato, and Aristotle. According to them, their principles in search of truth are excellent, and their results in geometrical, logical, natural and metaphysical sciences are exact and clear. The excellence and exactitude of their methods and results justify the claim that they are the only group of people capable of extracting the hidden truths in these matters.¹⁵⁴

But according to al-Ghazālī, they are merely the imitators of these high-sounding names, and their imitation is not different from the traditional, conventional imitation of the Christians and Jews, who follow their forefathers in the wrong way based on upbringing and unwarranted speculation. When they see that the prominent names of philosophy reject revelation and the religious laws and regard them as man-made beliefs and laws, they follow the same path without questioning their rightness. Instead of belittling the masses for their religious imitation, they should be aware of the fact that their situation is lower than the situation of the masses. What they do is worse since their own imitation leads them to the wrong way. The masses at least imitate the right path, and their sincerity brings them closer to salvation.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ Marmura, the translator of the book, uses the title “the Religious Preface” for this part, but it does not have a title in the original Arabic text. Al-Ghazālī, *The Incoherence*, 1.

¹⁵⁴ Al-Ghazālī, *The Incoherence*, 1.

¹⁵⁵ Al-Ghazālī, *The Incoherence*, 2-3.

Al-Ghazālī tells his readers that after seeing this group he decided to write the book in order to show the dangers and shortcomings of the ancient philosophers in matters of metaphysics. Regarding this science, al-Ghazālī argues that they try to hide from the masses the diversity of beliefs and opinions they hold among themselves and desire to deceive people with their certain methods and with the results of other sciences such as logic and geometry. He also declares that he will show these people that all the significant thinkers of philosophy believe in God and the judgment day, and that when it comes to these two issues the differences are mostly in details. Those who deny these points entirely have unbalanced minds, and no one has ever taken their thought seriously.¹⁵⁶ So, these imitators should stop imitating the speculations which they call philosophy and find suitable for their unbalanced disposition. The philosophers they claim to follow are innocent from their accusations, and they believe in God and his messengers. But their shortcoming is only that they are confused in certain details which results in confusing others as well.¹⁵⁷

Al-Ghazālī relates the apology of Aristotle regarding his disagreement with Plato in the first introduction. According to the story, Aristotle says that Plato is dear to him, but the truth is dearer than Plato.¹⁵⁸ The intent of al-Ghazālī by relating this story is to show his readers that disagreements exist widely among the philosophers. If their method in metaphysical sciences were as exact as they claim it to be then there should not be any disagreement. However, al-Ghazālī still acknowledges that their method in mathematical and logical sciences is based on a firm foundation and perfect in demonstration.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁶ Al-Ghazālī, *The Incoherence*, 3.

¹⁵⁷ Al-Ghazālī, *The Incoherence*, 3.

¹⁵⁸ It is not clear to me whether Aristotle phrased his apology in this form. But the source of the apology seems to be *Nicomachean Ethics* 1096a 15.

¹⁵⁹ Al-Ghazālī, *The Incoherence*, 4.

In the second introduction, al-Ghazālī divides the disputes that happen between the philosophers and their opponents into three parts. The first part is about the usage of terms. He does not see any purpose in plunging into this debate, stating that it is only a custom and formality. The second part is about the subjects which do not include anything problematic to religious principles. One of the several examples of this part is the philosophers' explanation of the lunar eclipse. He warns the believers not to indulge in refutation of such a theory based on religious concerns, saying whoever thinks to benefit religion by refuting such a theory does more harm in fact to religion than the one who attacks religion openly. The third part is related to the subjects which al-Ghazālī sees as contradictory to religious principles. These are the problem of the world's origin, the divine attributes, and the resurrection of bodies in the afterlife. Al-Ghazālī explicitly states that the mistakes of the philosophers must be shown only in these subjects and not in others.¹⁶⁰

In the third introduction, al-Ghazālī declares that he does not intend to defend any doctrine against the doctrines of the philosophers with the book. His intention is to show the weakness of their argument regarding metaphysical problems. To achieve his goal, al-Ghazālī says, he is not going to limit himself with one particular sect of Islam, but is going to borrow ideas freely from all of the Muslims sects.¹⁶¹

In the fourth introduction, al-Ghazālī continues to emphasize that the metaphysical claims of the philosophers have no connection to the certainty of the mathematical and logical sciences. In fact, the arguments they present in the metaphysical sciences do not fulfill the requirements of their logical sciences. When they are confronted with an objection in matters of metaphysics, they claim that the subject is obscure and difficult for the one who does not

¹⁶⁰ Al-Ghazālī, *The Incoherence*, 5–7.

¹⁶¹ Al-Ghazālī, *The Incoherence*, 7–8.

know logic and mathematics. Al-Ghazālī says this is a trick used by them in order to win the argument. For al-Ghazālī, one does not need to master mathematical and logical sciences in order to understand metaphysics, just like one does not need to know the shape of a particular house or its supporting frames and the number of its bricks in order to know that it has been built by someone who is alive and has power, knowledge, and the will to build it. Even though Al-Ghazālī fiercely attacks this claim, he completely agrees with their claim that the logical sciences must be mastered.¹⁶²

The introductions of *Incoherence* reveal that al-Ghazālī's main concern is not about the truth of the philosophers' teachings, but about their confidence in their method in the metaphysical sciences.¹⁶³ Al-Ghazālī sees emulation as the source of this confidence. After this, the confidence generates a sense of superiority among them, and it eventually results in their disregard for religious laws and rituals and their belittlement of the masses. It is such behavior, and not philosophy itself, that disturbs him most. In fact, when he refers to his opponents in *Incoherence*, he uses an ambiguous word *mutafalsifah*, which is open to interpretation and might mean pseudo-philosophers.¹⁶⁴ If this is the case, it is possible to say that his opposition was not directed toward philosophy, but toward pseudo-philosophy which, for al-Ghazālī, was the source of the negligent attitude toward religion. Another statement

¹⁶² Al-Ghazālī, *The Incoherence*, 8–9.

¹⁶³ For a detailed analysis of the introductions of *Destruction*, see Frank Griffel, "Taqlīd of the Philosophers: al-Ghazālī's Initial Accusation in His *Tahāfut*," in *Ideas, Images, and Methods of Portrayal: Insight into Classical Arabic Literature and Islam*, ed. Sebastian Günther (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2005), 273–296.

¹⁶⁴ Al-Ghazālī, *The Incoherence*, 4. Marmura translates the word as philosophers without paying any attention to ambiguity. But Frank Griffel notices it and expresses his concern, saying that the term "is unclear in its meaning, but [is] most probably a more pejorative expression than *falāsifa*." See Griffel, "Taqlīd of the Philosophers," 279.

which supports this point can be found in the religious introduction. Based on this statement, al-Ghazālī states that the prominent and leading philosophers are innocent of the incrimination they face because of the irresponsible reasoning and behavior of their emulators. In fact, for him, these prominent and leading philosophers believe in God and his messengers, and do not deny religious laws.¹⁶⁵

However, al-Ghazālī still asserts that even the prominent philosophers have made mistakes in metaphysics and the natural sciences. His challenge to philosophers in *Incoherence* is limited to these fields. The challenge also derives its strength from the epistemology of the philosophers. He forces them to accept the superiority of revelation and the inadequacy of their method in these matters. For him, if his immediate opponents had questioned the methods of their predecessors in matters of metaphysics and in some aspects of the natural sciences, they would have seen that their arguments do not fulfill the requirements of demonstration, and consequently do not produce indubitable conclusions.

With the book itself, al-Ghazālī sets out to perform this task. Surprisingly, his mode of argument is similar to that of the logical positivists of the twentieth century. One of them, Alfred Ayer, asserts that philosophy does not afford us “knowledge of a reality transcending the world of science and common sense.”¹⁶⁶ It is possible to say that al-Ghazālī also built *Incoherence* on this premise, and this makes *Incoherence* a book of philosophy, contrary to general assumption about its nature.

Recent scholarship about al-Ghazālī’s relation to philosophy recognizes this fact with confidence. Frank Griffel argues that al-Ghazālī’s goal is to show that there is not any

¹⁶⁵ Al-Ghazālī, *The Incoherence*, 3.

¹⁶⁶ Alfred J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic* (London: Penguin Books, 2001), 13. A comparison between Ayer and al-Ghazālī might be interesting regarding their critiques of metaphysics.

demonstrative proof which supports the metaphysics of the philosophers. But al-Ghazālī does not deny them completely and asserts that the unproven conclusions of the philosophers must be rejected only if they are incompatible with the literal wording of revelation. Griffel uses the fifth and the ninth chapters of *Incoherence* as his examples. The oneness of God and his incorporeal existence are the subjects of these chapters. Al-Ghazālī agrees with these positions, but he still devotes two chapters of the book to showing that philosophical reasoning does not justify the conclusion. In another chapter of *Incoherence*, al-Ghazālī attacks the notion that the heavenly spheres have souls which are responsible for the movements of their bodies. But again, al-Ghazālī seems to accept and teach this notion in his later works.¹⁶⁷

According to Griffel, *Incoherence* is a carefully written work and al-Ghazālī uses a language that implies a conscious formality. His presentations of the philosophical teachings are clear, precise, and to the point. But after these presentations, he puts forward his objections, trying to convince his readers that alternative explanations are just as convincing and plausible as the arguments of the philosophers. But overall, according to Griffel, al-Ghazālī's criticism of the selected number of philosophical teachings in fact aims to support the epistemological claims of revelation. For al-Ghazālī, philosophical teachings about God's nature, the human soul, or the heavenly spheres are derived mainly from revelation received by the early prophets, such as Abraham and Moses. Given that philosophers' information about these subjects cannot be supported by their own reasoning, their claim that they gained the information by reason alone is simply false.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁷ Griffel, *al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, 99.

¹⁶⁸ Griffel, *al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, 98–101.

Another scholar who supports the conclusions of Frank Griffel is Alexander Treiger. He questions the extent of al-Ghazālī's criticism of philosophical teachings in *Incoherence*. According to Treiger, al-Ghazālī intends only to undermine the reasoning of the philosophers. This intention gives him an opportunity to endorse their conclusions in his later works. Treiger asserts that *Incoherence* is a "pseudo-refutation," a refutation which appears to refute but with no intention of denying the actual teachings of one's opponents. He further claims that al-Ghazālī seems to agree with the philosophers' belief in an incorporeal afterlife in his later works, which is one of three teachings on the basis of which al-Ghazālī brands them as infidels at the end of *Incoherence* and for which he holds them accountable for capital punishment.¹⁶⁹

According to Treiger, al-Ghazālī plunders the realm of the philosophers efficiently under the guise of a public opponent and denouncer of their teachings. In his later works, however, he uses these teachings for his own good. But he carefully camouflages his usage with mystical-sounding terminology and serves them to his less educated readers.¹⁷⁰ For Treiger, al-Ghazālī is "a clandestine sympathizer and popularizer of philosophy, who is willing to accept even the most radical philosophical doctrines, while giving the appearance of denouncing them."¹⁷¹

Al-Ghazālī objects to the philosophers on sixteen matters of metaphysics and on four matters relating to the natural sciences, which together constitute the twenty discussion of the *Destruction*. Of these, the seventeenth discussion in particular has attracted the attention of the scholars since the publication of the book.

¹⁶⁹ Alexander Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge in Islamic Thought: al-Ghazālī's Theory of Mystical Cognition and its Avicennian Foundation* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 102–104.

¹⁷⁰ Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge*, 103.

¹⁷¹ Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge*, 104.

1.6 New Analyses of the Seventeenth Discussion

The question of causality has been one of the main controversies in Islamic thought. Two opposite views compete with each other regarding this problem. According to the Mutakallimūn, the universe is a direct creation of God in every instance, and other than his creation there is no efficient causal necessity in the chain of events. For the Muslim philosophers, however, the universe is the totality of natural and necessary emanations which ultimately originate in God. The textual evidence of this debate's importance in Islamic thought can be found most readily in the works of Al-Ghazālī and Ibn Rushd, mainly in their *Tahāfuts*.¹⁷² As an undoubted supporter of theory of causality, Ibn Rushd opposes al-Ghazālī, and his opposition places al-Ghazālī on the opposing side of the debate. Based mostly on Ibn Rushd's opposition to him, al-Ghazālī has been considered to be the main promoter of the Mutakallimūn's view in this debate.¹⁷³ But, the assumption of his commitment to the Mutakallimūn's view has been challenged based on evidence derived from the same text on which Ibn Rushd based his opposition. The text in question is the seventeenth discussion of *Destruction*.

Out of all of al-Ghazālī's writings, the seventeenth discussion of *Incoherence* serves as one of the most important passages for determining his theological and scientific standpoint. A casual reading of the seventeenth discussion may suggest that al-Ghazālī completely rejects the causal principle in the physical world in support of an all powerful God. He seems to accept that these two notions, that is to say causal necessity and an omnipotent God, are contradictory and mutually exclusive. This seems to be a highly plausible interpretation of the

¹⁷² Binyamin Abrahamov, "al-Ghazālī's Theory of Causality," *Studia Islamica*, no. 67, (1988), 75–77.

¹⁷³ For Ibn Rushd's refutation of al-Ghazālī in this respect see, Ibn Rushd, *Averroes' Tahafut al-Tahafut: (The Incoherence of the Incoherence)*, trans. Simon Van Den Bergh (Oxford: The University Press, 1954), v. 1, 316–333.

seventeenth discussion. But, with the change of the general perception about al-Ghazālī outlined above, the interpretation of the seventeenth discussion seems to be changing as well. Based on evidence derived from its complex structure, some researchers claim that the text does not suggest an opposition to the causal principle; on the contrary, al-Ghazālī advocates causality as an epistemological principle of the natural sciences in the seventeenth discussion.¹⁷⁴ Before presenting several examples from the new analyses, it will be appropriate to summarize the main points of the discussion.

Al-Ghazālī begins the seventeenth discussion of *Incoherence* with a striking sentence. He boldly states that “the connection between what is habitually believed to be a cause and what is habitually believed to be an effect is not necessary, according to us.”¹⁷⁵ After giving several examples of such connections like satiety and eating, burning and contact with fire, death and decapitation, etc., he continues to declare that the perceived connection is the result of a prior decision by God who creates them concomitantly without being restricted by any necessity. Their separation, that is to say satiety without eating or the continuation of life after decapitation is not impossible for God, contrary to the claims of the philosophers.¹⁷⁶

In order to discuss the matter, al-Ghazālī chooses from his several examples to focus specifically on the burning of cotton when in contact with fire. Even though he states that the discussion of this problem involves three positions, he only provides two positions throughout the seventeenth discussion.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁴ Frank Griffel, *al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, 147.

¹⁷⁵ Al-Ghazālī, *The Incoherence*, 170.

¹⁷⁶ Al-Ghazālī, *The Incoherence*, 170.

¹⁷⁷ Al-Ghazālī, *The Incoherence*, 170–171.

In the first position, the opponents claim that the agent of the burning is fire alone by nature (*fā'il bi'l-ṭab'*) and not by choice (*lā bi'l-ikhtiyār*), and it is not possible to refrain itself from burning when contact occurs with a substance receptive to it (*maḥall qābil lah*). Al-Ghazālī denies this position completely. According to him, the agent involved in the process of burning—creating blackness in the cotton, separating it into its pieces, and turning it to ashes—is God without mediation, or through the mediation of the angels. The philosophers have no proof that the presence of fire and the simultaneous burning of cotton means that there is no other cause for it. For al-Ghazālī, “existence ‘with’ a thing does not prove that it exists because of it.”¹⁷⁸

In order to support his position al-Ghazālī uses an example. He gives the case of a person whose eyes have been covered since his birth and who has therefore been unable to see. No one has ever explained to this person the difference between night and day. One day, the cover over his eyes is removed, and he sees the world for the first time. When this person sees the world in color, he thinks that the cause of this colorful world is the removal of the cover. But when the sun sets and the dark falls, he realizes that the cause for the imprinting of the colors in his sight is the sunlight.¹⁷⁹

On the basis of this example, al-Ghazālī asserts that his opponents cannot prove the nonexistence of a separate, non-observable cause when two things come into contact. Like the sun in the case above as a higher cause in the seeing of colors than the mere removal of the cover over one's eyes, there might be higher causes from which the events of the physical world emanate. Actually, al-Ghazālī asserts, the inquisitive among the philosophers have agreed (*ittifaqa muḥaqqiqūhum*) that the events and accidents which occur when contact takes

¹⁷⁸ Al-Ghazālī, *The Incoherence*, 171.

¹⁷⁹ Al-Ghazālī, *The Incoherence*, 171–172.

place between two things emanate from the giver of forms (*min jihat wāhib al-ṣuwar*). Thus, he concludes that the philosophers who claim that the fire is the only agent of burning are wrong.¹⁸⁰

In the second position, al-Ghazālī seems to be dealing with the inquisitive among the philosophers. According to them, temporal beings and events emanate from higher principles necessarily and by nature, not by way of deliberation and choice. In addition to this, the diversity of temporal beings and events emerges from the disposition (*isti'dād*) of the matter that receives the emanation of the higher principles. The example again is the sunlight. The sunlight comes down to earth by the necessity of its nature, and shiny materials receive it and reflect it, while other materials like mud do not behave in the same way. The difference happens because of the disposition of the material that receives it. Without the differentiating effect of innate disposition there would not be such a diversity of beings and events. Based on this notion, al-Ghazālī claims, they deny that Abraham fell into the fire without being burned. For them, fire necessarily burns and the body of Abraham necessarily is burned. In the process of Abraham's falling into the fire, there is no place for deliberation and choice on the part of the fire or the body of Abraham.¹⁸¹

Al-Ghazālī states that there are two approaches to this position. For the first approach, he declares that he does not accept that the principles do not act by choice or that God does not act freely. For al-Ghazālī, if God can choose to create the burning that occurs when fire and cotton meet, he can also choose not to create it.¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰ Al-Ghazālī, *The Incoherence*, 172.

¹⁸¹ Al-Ghazālī, *The Incoherence*, 172–173.

¹⁸² Al-Ghazālī, *The Incoherence*, 173.

Al-Ghazālī addresses an objection to the first approach. An opponent, he says, might claim that a creator free of the bonds of necessity might result in the occurrence of strange impossibilities, like someone leaving a book in his house and having it change into something totally different upon his return. For if God is capable of everything, then a person is not unreasonable in saying that he does not know what is in the house at any given moment.¹⁸³

In order to respond this objection, al-Ghazālī makes use of the notion of possibility. He says that these events are possible and not necessary. They may occur or may not occur. But their habitual continuous occurrence causes in our minds a sense of stable cognitions. Al-Ghazālī reminds the philosophers that they also accept that there are possibilities that have never taken place.¹⁸⁴ These stable cognitions are erased from people's minds when God creates a miracle by disrupting the habitual course of events. God knows that he does not create such things randomly even though they are possible for him. He creates the same knowledge for people as well. So, al-Ghazālī concludes, these examples of the philosophers are nothing but slanderous defamations.¹⁸⁵

For the second approach towards the position, al-Ghazālī makes a concession and admits that the fire is created in a way that when in contact with two pieces of cotton similar in all respects, it would burn both of them. However, he still sees it as possible that a prophet may be thrown into the fire without being burned, either by change in the properties of the fire or of the body of the prophet. The fire might burn in such a way as to keep its heat to itself without transferring it to the body of the prophet, or else the body might have a quality that

¹⁸³ Al-Ghazālī, *The Incoherence*, 173–174.

¹⁸⁴ Al-Ghazālī uses the example of strengthening of the soul to point of apprehending what the prophets apprehend. For the philosophers, this is a possibility that has never happened for ordinary people. *The Incoherence*, 175.

¹⁸⁵ Al-Ghazālī, *The Incoherence*, 174–175.

prevents the heat of the fire from reaching it. This might happen through the direct intervention of God or through the mediation of his angels. A body covered in talc is not burned in a fiery furnace even though the body is still a body and the fire is still fire. But people who have not witnessed this occasion will find it hard to believe in the existence of such an occasion. Even if this example sounds hard to believe, one should not deem impossible the strange and wondrous events which lie in God's power. Al-Ghazālī also adds that the revival of the dead and the changing of a stick into a snake are possible, since matter is receptive of all things. In these instances, the normal duration of a long process of change accelerates and the miracles of prophets may emerge suddenly.¹⁸⁶

At this point, al-Ghazālī imaginings an opponent asking whether these instances emerge from the power of the prophetic soul or from other principles. Al-Ghazālī does not seem to be willing to give a conclusive answer to the question, but he says that it is best to accept that they emerge either directly by God or through the mediation of his angels at a time when the prophets and the law (*niẓām al-sharʿ*) become specifically dependent on their emergence.¹⁸⁷ He claims that this answer is compatible with their explanation of the special endowment of the prophetic soul.¹⁸⁸

In this context, Al-Ghazālī seems to concede again that the predisposition of receptacles has a role to play in the creation of beings. He agrees that the sperm is receptive of the animal form and that from the human sperm only a human might come about, just as from the horse sperm only a horse might come into existence. This is because they are more appropriate to receive their specific forms from the angels. But he still brings counter examples to this position, saying that there are creatures whose receptiveness of their certain

¹⁸⁶ Al-Ghazālī, *The Incoherence*, 175–176.

¹⁸⁷ Al-Ghazālī, *The Incoherence*, 176.

¹⁸⁸ Al-Ghazālī, *The Incoherence*, 177.

forms is unknown to human beings, such as worms, snakes, and scorpions. These creatures are spontaneously created from the earth. Also, the masters of the talismanic art might bring into existence some strange and wondrous things with their deep understanding of the special properties of matter and stars. These examples show that the principles of dispositions are numerous beyond understanding, and with the power of God they sometimes behave in a way that seems strange for human understanding. Their strangeness does not mean that their occurrence is impossible. For al-Ghazālī, they sometimes happen and the philosophers' denial of prophetic miracles shows a lack of understanding of the wonders of the sciences.¹⁸⁹

At this point, al-Ghazālī allows his opponents to request a definition of what according to him constitutes the impossible (*ḥadd al-muḥāl*). The impossible, al-Ghazālī says, involves “affirming a thing conjointly with denying it, affirming the more specific while denying the more general, or affirming two things while negating one of them.”¹⁹⁰ Things that fall outside of this scope are not impossible, and are thus within the power of God. Through the end of the discussion, al-Ghazālī attempts to support the implication of his definition by providing several examples.¹⁹¹ But, it should be noted that al-Ghazālī clearly states that the impossible is not within the power of God.¹⁹²

Ilai Alon claims that the widely-held view of al-Ghazālī's total opposition to causality is a misunderstanding which has been caused by al-Ghazālī's attempt to conceal his true opinions. By examining the structure of the relevant chapter, and bringing semantic and contextual evidence, he argues that al-Ghazālī compromised the Mutakallimūn view in support of a more acceptable doctrine for both sides of the debate. For Alon, this was not the

¹⁸⁹ Al-Ghazālī, *The Incoherence*, 177–178.

¹⁹⁰ Al-Ghazālī, *The Incoherence*, 179.

¹⁹¹ Al-Ghazālī, *The Incoherence*, 179–181.

¹⁹² Al-Ghazālī, *The Incoherence*, 179.

first time al-Ghazālī attempted to reconcile two opposing views. Similar to his efforts to reconcile Sufism and orthodoxy, he also intended to reconcile Islam and philosophy. The compromise he made in causality seems to be a part of his intention to reconcile Islam and philosophy.¹⁹³ According to Alon, the implications of the principle of causal necessity for both Islam and philosophy were so essential that a more severe schism than the Mu‘tazilah and the Ahl al-Sunnah might have appeared in the realm of Islam. Al-Ghazālī was well qualified to notice this danger and offer a resolution between these competing worldviews because of his expertise in the theories of both sides.¹⁹⁴

In the first place, Alon supports his claim based on the structure of the discussion. He starts his examination before the seventeenth discussion in order to contextualize it more broadly. Before the seventeenth discussion, al-Ghazālī provides an introduction to assimilate the problem of causality into the second part of *Incoherence*, which deals with physics. Al-Ghazālī briefly describes his opponents’ views regarding causality in the introduction, saying that for them the connection between cause and effect is necessary and they are inseparable. This argument threatens the possibility of miracles in the physical world. The philosophers openly deny their existence and claim that they are sorcery, or they interpret the relevant material in a metaphorical way. Al-Ghazālī states the objective of the seventeenth discussion in this context and says that it is his aim to establish that God is all-powerful and that he always has the capacity to create miracles.¹⁹⁵

According to Alon, even though al-Ghazālī states that there are three philosophical approaches to the problem of causality, he provides four approaches in total. Alon describes

¹⁹³ Ilai Alon, “al-Ghazālī on Causality,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, v. 100, no. 4, October-December, 1980, 397.

¹⁹⁴ Alon, “al-Ghazālī on Causality,” 398.

¹⁹⁵ Alon, “al-Ghazālī on Causality,” 398–399.

these approaches as the extreme philosophical approach, the middle philosophical approach, the extreme religious approach, and the middle religious approach. In the analysis of Alon, the middle approaches to the problem are open for a possible reconciliation, while the extreme ones exclude each other. On the one extreme, the agent is only the direct natural cause, while on the other there is no agent other than God. For the middle approach of the philosophers, the agent is the principle of events which act through the disposition of the recipient. But, both the principle and the recipient act according to their nature necessarily, and this notion does not allow the possibility of miracles for al-Ghazālī. For the middle religious approach, the agent is God who acts directly or through the intermediacy of his angels. With the idea of angelic intermediation, al-Ghazālī comes closer to the philosophical notion of secondary causation. Also, while presenting the middle religious approach, he makes a concession towards the acceptance of the idea of natural disposition by stating that fire and cotton have certain qualities that make them behave in a particular way. His explanation of the miracles in this passage does not entail a radical change in the physical world.¹⁹⁶ Alon asserts that al-Ghazālī seems to follow the middle religious approach, which gives him several opportunities to make serious concessions to the philosophers' doctrine.¹⁹⁷

In the second place, Alon provides semantic evidence to support his argument. He offers three examples from the seventeenth discussion. First, according to Alon, al-Ghazālī declares that there are three approaches to the problem (*wa li'l-kalām fī al-mas'alah thalathat maqāmāt*).¹⁹⁸ But he uses the word *maqām* two times in the discussion. For the third, he instead uses the word *maslak*. Alon does not explain the relevance of this difference in

¹⁹⁶ Alon, "al-Ghazālī on Causality," 399–402.

¹⁹⁷ Alon, "al-Ghazālī on Causality," 402.

¹⁹⁸ Al-Ghazālī, *The Incoherence*, 167.

wording, but says that this cannot be interpreted as carelessness.¹⁹⁹ It seems that Alon takes this instance as a proof that the discussion is written in a complicated and enigmatic manner, as if al-Ghazālī intentionally conceals his real views from inattentive readers.²⁰⁰

The second example of Alon is that al-Ghazālī describes the philosophers who hold the middle approach as “those among them who hold right views.” According to Alon, al-Ghazālī presents their views in a way that comes closer to the middle religious approach which al-Ghazālī seems to promote.²⁰¹ Alon’s third example is that at the beginning of his description of the middle religious approach, al-Ghazālī states that one way to escape from the logical absurdities that might be caused by the acceptance of the extreme religious approach is for him to agree that fire is created with a certain nature. He uses here the word *naslam*, and Alon asserts that the word “connotes a certain compromise more than it does agreement.”²⁰²

In the third place, Alon draws his evidence from the internal context of the seventeenth discussion. According to Alon, al-Ghazālī is aware of the logical dangers that the extreme religious approach may cause. His awareness of this situation can only mean that he is prepared to bring new arguments in order to avoid them. Since the dangers might appear because of the violation of logic, al-Ghazālī’s new arguments to prevent them are to be in conformity with logic. This indicates that some concessions to the philosophical approach have to be made.²⁰³ Alon thinks that al-Ghazālī’s acceptance of the concept of the “nature” of a thing when he talks about fire burning two pieces of similar cotton is a more substantial concession. With this concession, al-Ghazālī almost entirely affirms the idea of causality. The

¹⁹⁹ Alon, “al-Ghazālī on Causality,” 403.

²⁰⁰ Alon, “al-Ghazālī on Causality,” 398.

²⁰¹ Alon, “al-Ghazālī on Causality,” 398.

²⁰² Alon, “al-Ghazālī on Causality,” 403.

²⁰³ Alon, “al-Ghazālī on Causality,” 403.

language he uses in this part is the same as the languages he uses to describe the second philosophical approach.²⁰⁴

Alon sees another compromise in al-Ghazālī's explanation of miracles. According to Alon, al-Ghazālī agrees to reduce miracles to physical phenomena by explaining them with the physical change of matter and form with an acceleration of time. In return for this concession, what al-Ghazālī demands from the philosophers is hardly a fundamental issue. Again for Alon, al-Ghazālī tries to convince his opponents by giving them the examples of marvelous things from the physical world.²⁰⁵

Alon says that the most important concession from al-Ghazālī comes at the end of the seventeenth discussion when al-Ghazālī situates God's omnipotence inside the scope of possibility. At the beginning, al-Ghazālī expresses the defense of God's omnipotence as one of the two objectives of the chapter, while at the end he defines impossibility as something which cannot be done by God. For Alon, by accepting the concept of impossibility for God, al-Ghazālī rejects the extreme religious approach and makes the ultimate concession to the philosophers.²⁰⁶

Lenn Evan Goodman's analysis of the seventeenth discussion is also in correspondence with the new understanding that the assumption of al-Ghazālī's denial of causality altogether cannot be supported by textual evidence.²⁰⁷ Goodman asserts that the subject matter of the relevant discussion is not the connection between cause and effect but rather the specific doctrine of the neo-Platonic Aristotelians who claim that the connection

²⁰⁴ Alon, "al-Ghazālī on Causality," 403.

²⁰⁵ Alon, "al-Ghazālī on Causality," 403–404.

²⁰⁶ Alon, "al-Ghazālī on Causality," 404.

²⁰⁷ Lenn Evan Goodman, "Did al-Ghazālī Deny Causality?" *Studia Islamica*, no. 47 (1978), 83–120.

between cause and effect is necessary, and they logically entail each other by necessity in the phenomenal or empirical world.²⁰⁸ What al-Ghazālī aims to disprove in the discussion is the philosophers' radical assertion of the empiricism of casual necessity.²⁰⁹ For Goodman, Al-Ghazālī acknowledges the fact that there is a connection between cause and effect, but he attributes the connection to the command of God and does not accept that the connection is intrinsically necessary.²¹⁰

According to al-Ghazālī, Goodman asserts, the only evidence the philosophers can bring about the necessity of the connection is the observation of causal conjunction. But what is observed for al-Ghazālī is the simultaneity of two events, not the causal connection between them. Even though al-Ghazālī seems to be denying causal connection here, Goodman believes that al-Ghazālī leaves the possibility open that observed causes are actual causes without necessarily being the sole sufficient causes.²¹¹ In fact, for Goodman, al-Ghazālī presupposes the concept of causality; nevertheless, he claims that it cannot be deduced from contiguity in the material world, and trying to do so is inconsistent with the fundamental assumptions of the Aristotelian neo-Platonist principles of Islamic philosophers.²¹²

Similar to Ilai Alon, Goodman thinks that al-Ghazālī's description of the several approaches to the problem has caused interpretive problems for his critics, most notably for Ibn Rushd. For Goodman, Ibn Rushd's representation of al-Ghazālī as embracing the extreme religious approach is a disservice to philosophical accuracy and fairness.²¹³ Al-Ghazālī rejects

²⁰⁸ Goodman, "Did al-Ghazālī," 83–84.

²⁰⁹ Goodman, "Did al-Ghazālī," 85.

²¹⁰ Goodman, "Did al-Ghazālī," 87.

²¹¹ Goodman, "Did al-Ghazālī," 91.

²¹² Goodman, "Did al-Ghazālī," 94.

²¹³ Goodman, "Did al-Ghazālī," 104, and 107.

explicitly not only the extreme religious approach but also the more logically developed approach of Ash‘arism.²¹⁴

Goodman also claims that the position al-Ghazālī adopts should be located in the passage when he talks about the nature of fire and cotton.²¹⁵ From this passage, it is clear that al-Ghazālī adopts the notion that a given cause will have a given effect and that without a change in the cause there will be no change in the effect. Based on this position, it is possible to say that a causal chain of events can be changed solely by naturalistic interventions.²¹⁶ According to Goodman, despite Ibn Rushd’s supposition “that al-Ghazālī’s critique of the Aristotelian concept of causal necessity would destroy all scientific inquiry and indeed all intelligible discourse,” what is affirmed clearly by al-Ghazālī in this passage is the fundamental assumption of all scientific investigation.²¹⁷ So at this point Goodman asks the question of why al-Ghazālī retains causality while rejecting the doctrine of necessity as proposed by the philosophers, and he answers his own question: “I think it would be safe to say that he was motivated by the same rationalistic affection for science as moved the philosophers, a science which he like them would place in the service of theology as a means of studying and appreciating the wisdom of divine plan. And he, like them, was probably equally motivated by a distaste for the notion of a capricious or as Ibn Rushd expresses it, a tyrannical God.”²¹⁸ At the end of his article, Goodman confidently concludes with an answer

²¹⁴ Goodman, “Did al-Ghazālī,” 105.

²¹⁵ Goodman, “Did al-Ghazālī,” 107.

²¹⁶ Goodman, “Did al-Ghazālī,” 108.

²¹⁷ Goodman, “Did al-Ghazālī,” 108.

²¹⁸ Goodman, “Did al-Ghazālī,” 111.

to the question that constitutes the title of the article by saying that even in the case of affirming the reality of miracles al-Ghazālī did not deny the principle of causality.²¹⁹

Frank Griffel also describes the understanding of al-Ghazālī's denial of causal connection as false. He asserts that in the seventeenth discussion, al-Ghazālī does not deny the existence of causal connections, and he never argues that using efficient causality as an explanatory tool for change which occurs in the phenomenal world is false. With the seventeenth discussion, al-Ghazālī shows the ways that causality can be utilized in the natural sciences as an epistemological principle. The seventeenth discussion is not a criticism of causal connection, but it is a criticism of the necessitarianism proposed by Ibn Sina. In Ibn Sina's proposal, the events in this world are determined necessarily and cannot depart from the determined course of action in any way.²²⁰

Griffel argues that al-Ghazālī's initial objection to the doctrine of the philosophers creates an expectation in the reader that the solution he will bring for the problem is going to be an occasionalist one. But, Griffel argues, even though the discussion points towards occasionalism as a solution, it creates room for other possible solutions. In fact, al-Ghazālī successfully reminds his readers of the dangers of the occasionalist view in several places. So, he sets out to develop alternative explanations which are very likely to satisfy the requirements of physical processes in the world without limiting himself with the necessary causation of the philosophers.²²¹ Griffel devotes several pages to show that al-Ghazālī's understanding of modality differs from the understanding of Ibn Sina, and that the gist of the problem and solution has to be sought in this subject.²²² In conclusion, he asserts that al-

²¹⁹ Goodman, "Did al-Ghazālī," 120.

²²⁰ Frank Griffel, *al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, 147.

²²¹ Griffel, *al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, 149–150.

²²² Griffel, *al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, 162–172.

Ghazālī upholds the notion of contingency in nature against Ibn Sina’s strict necessitarianism. For al-Ghazālī, the universe is the possible effect of God’s free will and his conscious choice among other possible alternative universes. This does not mean that al-Ghazālī denies the principle of causality or secondary causation in this universe of ours.²²³

Griffel identifies this interpretation of the seventeenth discussion as the representation of the majority opinion of the modern interpreters. These interpreters commonly agree that in the last section of the seventeenth discussion, al-Ghazālī makes great concessions to his philosopher opponents. In this section, he accepts that God is bound not only by certain rules of logic, such as the principle of the excluded middle, but also by certain laws of nature derived from sense experience. Griffel counts the impossibility of changing genera as part of the limitations al-Ghazālī imposes on God.²²⁴

Binyamin Abrahamov agrees with the majority interpretation of the seventeenth discussion, yet he goes beyond the scope of it and sets out to examine al-Ghazālī’s non-philosophical writings regarding the problem of causality.²²⁵ In addition to *al-Iqtisād fī al-I’tiqād*, he focuses on three other works of al-Ghazālī: *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*, *al-Maqṣad al-Athnāfi Sharḥ Asmā’ Allah al-Ḥusnā*, and *Kitāb al-‘Arba’in fī Uṣūl al-Dīn*. He finds that al-Ghazālī’s treatment of the subject in these three works is very similar to his treatment in the seventeenth discussion. According to Abrahamov, the only exception is *al-Iqtisād fī al-I’tiqād*, a work in which al-Ghazālī follows the Ash‘arite doctrine strictly.²²⁶

²²³ Griffel, *al-Ghazālī’s Philosophical Theology*, 173.

²²⁴ Griffel, *al-Ghazālī’s Philosophical Theology*, 159–160.

²²⁵ Binyamin Abrahamov, “al-Ghazālī’s Theory of Causality,” *Studia Islamica*, no. 67, (1988), 75–98.

²²⁶ Abrahamov, “al-Ghazālī’s Theory,” 97.

Abrahamov states that for al-Ghazālī, God creates things and their natures. In order to influence other things, they follow the plan which is established by God for the world of phenomena. The plan is based on the chain of condition and conditioned. In this chain, al-Ghazālī considers God as the divine cause, and he combines divine causation with secondary causation. In the combination, God is the creator and sustainer of the inherent natures of the secondary causes. Thus, al-Ghazālī establishes his own theory of causation by proposing a chain of cause and effect with God as its first cause and its constant maintainer. Abrahamov asserts that this theory of causation is the result of a compromise made between orthodox Islam and philosophy.²²⁷

Recent scholarship on al-Ghazālī has asserted that his opposition to the principle of causation as an upholder of Ash‘arism cannot be based on the evidence derived from the relevant texts. The notion of opposition finds its origin mostly in the writings of his staunch enemy, Ibn Rushd, who served in many cases as the only source about al-Ghazālī for the early scholars. Contrary to Ibn Rushd’s opinion, the new analyses of the texts offer an image of al-Ghazālī with a much more complex theory of causation. Rather than being in accord with the Mutakallimūn, his theory seems to confirm the chain of causation of the philosophers with some minor modifications. This new understanding is also supported by the findings of Richard M. Frank who has devoted several works to examining al-Ghazālī’s loyalty to Ash‘arism.

1.7 Al-Ghazālī between the Ash‘arite Theology and the Philosophy of Ibn Sīnā

It has been seen that one important aspect of the assumption that al-Ghazālī was opposed to philosophy in general and the method of scientific investigation in particular was that it was based on the judgment that he had strictly committed to the Ash‘arite theology and

²²⁷ Abrahamov, “al-Ghazālī’s Theory,” 97–98.

set out to defend it against groups with competing systems. Among these systems, the system of the philosophers with their notion of God and the principle of causality seems to have emerged as the most coherent and compelling one logically and empirically. Leaning on the Ash‘arite theology, however, al-Ghazālī considered this notion of God and the principle of causality as harmful to religion as expressed in the system of the philosophers and felt compelled to refute it. It is possible to say that the foundation of this understanding was derived mostly from Ibn Rushd’s enmity towards al-Ghazālī by his European followers. However, the assumption of al-Ghazālī’s commitment to Ash‘arism has been undergoing a critical reevaluation in recent years. As the result of this examination, al-Ghazālī is emerging as a clandestine follower of Ibn Sīnā with a particular kind of Avicennism. Richard M. Frank seems to be the most influential scholar in this critical examination, and Alexander Treiger takes the argument one step further by substantiating it with textual evidence.

Richard Frank argues that the theology of al-Ghazālī is the result of the larger pursuit of an intellectual vision of the universe aimed at situating religious belief and prophecy in a more coherent system than the pursuit of the earlier Ash‘arites. For al-Ghazālī, a purely intellectual and theoretical understanding of the universe and God’s relation with it is a much more important problem than the topics which had occupied his predecessors in *kalām*, such as determining the basis of religious belief and protecting it with the dialectics of *kalām*. In his higher pursuit, al-Ghazālī earnestly engaged with the works of Ibn Sīnā and his system. The influence of his engagement with Ibn Sīnā manifested itself in his works as one of the most profound effects on his thinking.²²⁸ As a result, while rejecting some basic principles and

²²⁸ Richard M. Frank, *Creation and the Cosmic System: al-Ghazālī and Avicenna* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1992),

ideas from the philosophy of Ibn Sīnā, al-Ghazālī embraced others, which put his theology in fundamental contradiction with classical Ash‘arite theology.²²⁹

According to Frank, al-Ghazālī’s thought slowly moves from the language and the analysis of traditional *kalām* towards the philosophy of Ibn Sīnā by complicating the discourse on God and his creative activity with more formal language. Frank bases his argument on the comparison between al-Ghazālī’s works such as *al-Maqṣad* and the earlier Ash‘arite manuals such as al-Qushayrī’s *Taḥbīr*. He sees that in al-Qushayrī, God’s universal will and presence in events and in the activities of creatures is a subject of which the readers are constantly reminded, whereas in al-Ghazālī, a more theoretical elaboration of God’s creative activity and his relation with his creation is the central focus of the discussion. Rather than focusing on the traditional topics, al-Ghazālī repeats the understanding of universe as a unified whole in which events take place in an unbreakable chain of causes and effects, which reminds Frank of the cosmological and theological theories of Ibn Sīnā.²³⁰

In traditional Ash‘arite theology, Frank continues, no event or creature produces or causes another. The Ash‘arites see each event as a separate occurrence of God’s immediate creation in an occasionalistic universe. Al-Ghazālī, on the other hand, adopts the efficiency of the secondary causes in the sublunary world and holds that “some things are caused immediately by the antecedent operation of other contingent entities, that they occur through, come to be from, and are produced by their causes.”²³¹ Al-Ghazālī’s language suggests that the traditional Ash‘arite system and Ibn Sīnā’s explanation of the determinate order of the secondary causes are in fact equivalent descriptions of the same natural process. But for Frank, al-Ghazālī is well-qualified to be aware of the implications of this suggestion, and

²²⁹ Frank, *Creation and the Cosmic System*, 11.

²³⁰ Frank, *Creation and the Cosmic System*, 15–16

²³¹ Frank, *Creation and the Cosmic System*, 37.

“certainly none of his contemporaries who possessed a serious understanding of the standard school theology could have failed to see that his aim is to adapt the traditional language and formulations to his own quasi-Avicennian vision of creation.”²³² For Frank, what al-Ghazālī incorporated into his own theology from the philosophy of Ibn Sīnā is much more important and substantial than what he rejected.²³³

Based on his investigation of the texts, Frank outlines al-Ghazālī’s theology as follows: “(1) that the created universe is a closed, deterministic system of secondary causes whose operation is governed by the first created being, an ‘angel’ (or ‘intellect’) associated with the outermost sphere, (2) that God cannot intervene in the operation of secondary causes, celestial or sublunary, and (3) that it is impossible that God would have willed to create a universe in any respect different from this one which He has created.”²³⁴ So for Richard Frank, al-Ghazālī was an Ash‘arite at only a general or elementary level, and there is no evidence that he held their doctrine genuinely as his own.²³⁵

Even though Frank’s interpretation of al-Ghazālī’s theology had stirred a lively debate and received a serious criticism from several scholars,²³⁶ it seems to be gaining general

²³² Frank, *Creation and the Cosmic System*, 37.

²³³ Frank, *Creation and the Cosmic System*, 86.

²³⁴ Richard M. Frank, *al-Ghazālī and the Ash‘arite School* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1994), 4.

²³⁵ Frank, *al-Ghazālī and the Ash‘arite School*, 101.

²³⁶ Michael E. Marmura has published a long review of Frank’s book *Creation and the Cosmic System*, arguing that his analysis of al-Ghazālī’s language was open to serious criticism. He tells that in order to determine al-Ghazālī’s theological stance one must investigate al-Ghazālī’s discussion pertinent to causality. He asserts that it can be seen clearly in the *Incoherence* and its sequence *Moderation in Belief* that al-Ghazālī denies any causal efficacy in created things even though he used causal language sometimes as used in ordinary language and sometimes as used in the language of the philosophers. Marmura goes on to analyze the argument of Frank by

recognition among Ghazālī scholars. One of these scholars is Alexander Treiger, who wrote his dissertation about the influence of Ibn Sīnā on al-Ghazālī. He later published his dissertation as a monograph.

Following the footsteps of Dimitri Gutas, his PhD advisor when he was a graduate student at Yale University, Treiger takes Ibn Sīnā as the towering figure of Islamic thought. It should be noted here that according to Gutas, the defining moment for the later developments in Islamic thought was the movement to translate the Greek heritage²³⁷ and to incorporate and “appropriate”²³⁸ it into Arabic through the peripatetic (*mashshāī*) tradition in general and Ibn Sīnā in particular.²³⁹ In accord with his teacher, the argument that Treiger presents throughout

using the same passages, and sometimes adding different passages to his analyses from other works of al-Ghazālī. He concludes that Frank did not include in his analyses of al-Ghazālī the three chapters of the *Incoherence* in which al-Ghazālī excommunicates the philosophers. According to him, the declaration of excommunication was not merely a rhetorical utterance but a legal statement, and he repeated this statement consistently in his other works as well. See his “Ghazālīan Causes and Intermediaries,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, v. 115, no. 1, (January-March, 1995), 89–100. Ahmad Dallal followed the footsteps of Marmura and wrote a long review of Frank’s second book *Al-Ghazālī and the Ash’arite School*. In this review Dallal claimed that Frank’s representation of al-Ghazālī’s thought is often open to alternative interpretations and tried to show using the same passages which were used by Frank in his work that al-Ghazālī was an Ash’arite. He concluded that for al-Ghazālī’s part there is a “consistent commitment to traditional Ash’arism, not just at the level of ideology, but also at the level of deeper theoretical conceptions and objectives.” See his “al-Ghazālī and the Perils of Interpretation,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, v. 122, no. 4, (October-December, 2003), 773–787.

²³⁷ Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early ‘Abbasid Society (2nd-4th/8th-10th centuries)* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 6.

²³⁸ Gutas seems to have some reservation for the word ‘appropriation’, see, *Greek Thought*, 187.

²³⁹ Dimitri Gutas, “Ibn Sīnā’nın Mirası: Arap Felsefesinin Altın Çağı (1000-yaklaşık 1350)” in *Ibn Sīnā’nın Mirası*, edited and translated by M. Cuneit Kaya, İstanbul: Klasik Yayınları, 2004, 133–151.

the book is that even though al-Ghazālī tried to cover up his dependence on philosophy throughout his whole career, he was heavily dependent on the writings of Ibn Sīnā when he was developing his theory of mystical cognition. In this matter, he adopted Ibn Sīnā's noetics and the theory of prophecy almost completely but replaced its terminology with a more mystical-sounding terminology that he derived from the more acceptable traditional religious sources. He presented his teachings in this manner in order to escape the criticism of the religious scholars as exemplified during the Nishapur controversy. In Treiger's own words, "in the guise of a critic, al-Ghazālī was, in fact, one of the greatest popularizers of philosophy in medieval Islam, indeed a kind of a 'Trojan horse,' which brought Avicenna's philosophy into the heart of Islamic thought. After al-Ghazālī, Islam became once and for all inundated with Avicennian ideas."²⁴⁰

In the introduction of his book, Treiger points out a recent paradigm change in Ghazālī studies. According to Treiger, "scholars have identified considerable problems with al-Ghazālī's presentation of his engagement with philosophy."²⁴¹ His *Incoherence* is not based on *Intentions (Maqāsid)* as al-Ghazālī himself claimed, so *Intentions* was probably written at an earlier time rather than the date stated by al-Ghazālī. The sophistication of *Incoherence* suggests a lifelong engagement with philosophy, so his claim that he mastered philosophy in two years with an additional year of reflection cannot be credible. Al-Ghazālī's *Deliverer (al-Munqidh)* was written as an apology related to the Nishapur controversy, so the relevance of his narrative to philosophy in this work must be taken with a grain of salt. With these problems at hand, he says "the question of al-Ghazālī's intellectual leanings, his attitude to philosophy, his methodology, and his theological agenda has therefore to be opened

²⁴⁰ Alexander Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge in Islamic Thought: al-Ghazālī's Theory of Mystical Cognition and Its Avicennian Foundation* (New York: Routledge 2012), 104.

²⁴¹ Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge*, 3.

anew.”²⁴² So Treiger states the objective of his own book as “an exploration of al-Ghazālī’s theory of mystical cognition and of its Avicennian underpinnings.”²⁴³

Throughout the book, Treiger tries to substantiate his argument by comparing the works of al-Ghazālī and Ibn Sīnā with a focus on specific terms such as heart (*qalb*), intelligence (*‘aql*), knowledge (*‘ilm*), and cognition (*ma’rifah*). He identifies these terms as “the most elementary building blocks of al-Ghazālī’s noetics.”²⁴⁴

According to Treiger, what al-Ghazālī tries to revive with the publication of *the Revival of the Religious Sciences* is the Science of the Path to the Afterlife (*‘ilm ṭarīq al-ākhirah*). This science does not include the worldly sciences of religion, such as *fiqh* and *kalam*; quite the contrary, it aims to demote them.²⁴⁵ The Science of the Path to the Afterlife is divided into two parts: the science of unveiling (*‘ilm al-mukāshafah*) and the science of practice (*‘ilm al-mu‘āmalah*). Treiger asserts that this division is modeled after the Aristotelian division of philosophy.²⁴⁶ Al-Ghazālī presents *Revival* as a book not about the science of unveiling but about the science of practice. However, as pointed out by Lazarus-Yafeh,²⁴⁷ al-Ghazālī turns in different directions throughout the book and Treiger takes these turnings as hints toward the science of unveiling. According to Treiger, al-Ghazālī derived the central concepts of this science, such as salvation (*najāt*) and felicity (*sa‘ādah*), from Islamic philosophy.²⁴⁸

²⁴² Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge*, 4.

²⁴³ Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge*, 8.

²⁴⁴ Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge*, 17.

²⁴⁵ Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge*, 36.

²⁴⁶ Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge*, 37.

²⁴⁷ Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge*, 40.

²⁴⁸ Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge*, 44–47.

Treiger continues to support his argument with the exploration of two terms: tasting (*dhawq*) and witnessing (*mushāhadah*). According to al-Ghazālī, an understanding of tasting requires a state which cannot be achieved through intellectual effort. He often uses examples in order to convey what he means with the term tasting. His examples come from the experiences of sexual pleasure, health, and intoxication. A child or an impotent person cannot taste the pleasure of having sex unless they engage in this activity, even if it is possible for them to make a comparison from other pleasures. Al-Ghazālī's explanation of the process suggests his dependence on Ibn Sīnā's theory of incommunicable intellectual pleasure of knowledge which can be perceived only through experience.²⁴⁹ As for the understanding of the term witnessing, al-Ghazālī divides people into three classes: the common folk who obey the authority without questioning, the dogmatic theologians who use their reason, and the cognizant (*al-ʿarīfūn*) who witness through the light of certainty. Treiger claims that his examples are mostly taken from the works of Ibn Sīnā and this threefold division of people is a rendering from the classes of people advanced by Ibn Sīnā.²⁵⁰ In the philosophy of Ibn Sīnā, however, witnessing through the light of certainty is expressed with the theory of the intellectual vision of the intelligible.²⁵¹

Treiger proceeds to examine al-Ghazālī's dependence on philosophy by establishing the connections between al-Ghazālī's notions of inspiration and revelation (*ilhām* and *wahy*) with Ibn Sīnā's notion of intuition (*ḥads*). He makes a comparison between the interpretations of these two scholars regarding the famous Verse of Light (The Qur'ān, 24:35), and asserts

²⁴⁹ Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge*, 63.

²⁵⁰ Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge*, 60–62.

²⁵¹ Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge*, 63.

that Ibn Sīnā's notion of intuition served as the background to al-Ghazālī's exegesis of the verse.²⁵²

Treiger also brings new angles to al-Ghazālī's attitude toward philosophy. According to Treiger, al-Ghazālī endorses many philosophical teachings that he condemns in *Incoherence*. This leads him to conclude that *Tahāfut* is a pseudo-refutation.²⁵³ He answers the question of why al-Ghazālī wrote this work with a direct quotation from Frank Griffel: "By criticizing a selected number of teachings in the *falāsifa*'s metaphysics and natural sciences, al-Ghazālī aims to make room for the epistemological claims of revelation."²⁵⁴

Another work of al-Ghazālī Treiger examines is his *Deliverer (al-Munqidh)*. Treiger reports the historical setting that led al-Ghazālī to write this book. This incident is known as the Nishapur controversy, and Treiger states that *Deliverer* is much more revealing about al-Ghazālī's discourse and attitude toward philosophy than his other works.²⁵⁵ Treiger concludes his book by stating that "Far from causing a downfall of philosophy (itself an invention of Western historians of Arabic philosophy), al-Ghazālī was in fact a key contributor to a deep philosophical transformation of all aspects of Islamic thought—including *Kalām* and Sūfism—and to an unprecedented flourishing of Avicennian philosophy itself."²⁵⁶

1.8 Conclusion

It seems that the old story of the demise of philosophy in Islam after Ibn Rushd has completely collapsed and been replaced by a new story. In the new one, it is asserted that the

²⁵² Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge*, 74–78.

²⁵³ Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge*, 93–96.

²⁵⁴ Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge*, 94.

²⁵⁵ Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge*, 81–101.

²⁵⁶ Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge*, 104.

philosophical tradition in the Islamic world has continued to flourish long after the death of Ibn Rushd. In fact, Ibn Rushd is not even considered as a central figure in the new story. He practiced philosophy on the edge of the Islamic world without leaving any substantial influence on the intellectual activities at the center of the Muslim lands, mainly modern-day Iran and Iraq. The philosopher who takes the central place in this story is Ibn Sīnā, and Ibn Rushd becomes a peripheral figure who becomes an opposing figure to Ibn Sīnā.²⁵⁷

Al-Ghazālī played an important role in the old story. He served as the main antagonist who produced the most destructive ideas against philosophy, and eventually caused its disappearance from Muslim societies. Ibn Rushd's influence was felt in this respect mainly as a result of the polemics he directed towards al-Ghazālī. Because of the geographical proximity to and availability of his works in Europe, his rhetoric about al-Ghazālī was picked up quickly by the early scholars of the field and provided one aspect of the foundation of the story.²⁵⁸

With the new story however, the role of al-Ghazālī too is changing dramatically regarding his relation to philosophy. He appears in the new story as a more progressive thinker compared to his orthodox contemporaries, that is to say the Ash'arites. In fact, it is argued that he broke his allegiance to orthodoxy and moved towards a more theoretical system similar to philosophy.²⁵⁹ As the central figure in Islamic philosophy, Ibn Sīnā is

²⁵⁷ Dimitri Gutas, "The Study of Arabic Philosophy in the Twentieth Century: An Essay on the Historiography of Arabic Philosophy," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, v. 29, no: 1, May 2002, 5–25.

²⁵⁸ Frank Griffel, "The Western Reception of al-Ghazālī's Cosmology from the Middle Ages to the 21st Century," *Dîvân Disiplinlerarası Çalışmalar Dergisi* 30 (2011/1), 33–62.

²⁵⁹ Richard M. Frank, Richard M. Frank, *Creation and the Cosmic System: al-Ghazālī and Avicenna* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1992); and again his *al-Ghazālī and the Ash'arite School* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1994).

considered as the main influence in this move with the assertion that al-Ghazālī's thought was shaped around the principal notions of Ibn Sīnā's philosophy. Accordingly, al-Ghazālī is thought to be the Trojan horse of philosophy in Islam for his propagation of his particular kind of Avicennism.²⁶⁰

Ibn Rushd and his European followers must not take all the blame about the old perception of al-Ghazālī. It should be remembered that al-Ghazālī himself played a conscious role in shaping opinion about himself by giving misleading information about his education and intellectual leanings in his autobiography. His autobiography has been taken as the definitive account on al-Ghazālī for a long time, as exemplified in modern scholarship most clearly by Montgomery Watt.²⁶¹ But again, recent scholarship is challenging the genuineness of his autobiography, based on the argument that the autobiography was one of the apologetic books which were produced under special circumstances known as the Nishapur controversy in which al-Ghazālī was accused of borrowing from philosophy. The topic of the next chapter is going to be al-Ghazālī's attempt to conceal his connection with philosophy, and the events and accusations which triggered the Nishapur controversy are going to make the picture more visible. It will be seen that Ibn Sīnā was not the only philosopher al-Ghazālī was accused of borrowing from during his lifetime. Besides Ibn Sīnā, there was Ikhwān al-Ṣafā and their *Rasā'il*, which al-Ghazālī was said to be very fond of reading.

²⁶⁰ Alexander Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge in Islamic Thought: al-Ghazālī's Theory of Mystical Cognition and Its Avicennian Foundation* (New York: Routledge 2012).

²⁶¹ William M. Watt, *Muslim Intellectual: A Study of al-Ghazālī* (Edinburgh: The University Press, 1963).

CHAPTER II

CONCEALED CONNECTION: AL-GHAZĀLĪ'S RELATION WITH *RASĀ'IL* *IKHWĀN AL-ŞAFĀ'*

2.1 Introduction

As seen in the first chapter, modern scholarship has characterized the philosophy of Ibn Sīnā as being the main philosophical influence over al-Ghazālī. However, the objective of this study is to put *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Şafā'* on the list of al-Ghazālī's philosophical sources. In order to achieve this objective, it is necessary to talk about the connection between *Rasā'il* and al-Ghazālī, a connection which he usually hesitated to either acknowledge or deny.

This connection is going to be dealt with in this chapter. This will be done first by situating it in a broader perspective by incorporating some modern approaches to Islamic philosophy and a particular treatment of Ibn Sīnā into the discussion. Then, it will be argued that al-Ghazālī's reluctance to either acknowledge or deny his connection to *Rasā'il* is not an issue particular to him, but was personally exemplified before him by Ibn Sīnā. It will also be argued that this hesitation, in fact, was necessitated by the political and sociological conditions of the era, since *Rasā'il* were considered by the powerful to be a product of the adherents of a heretical sect, Ismā'īlism. And finally, it will be shown that the notion of adherence to Ismā'īlism made the situation worse for al-Ghazālī during the final years of his life when he faced serious opposition from several quarters regarding his connection to philosophy and the heretics. This period in his life is known as the Nishapur controversy. In order to exonerate himself from the accusations, al-Ghazālī published his so-called

autobiography, *Deliverer from Error*, which was full of unfavorable remarks on the Ikhwān and their *Rasā'il*.

The objective of this chapter in offering a detailed discussion on these topics is to establish an understanding that unfavorable remarks made by the scholars of the era, especially by al-Ghazālī, regarding Ikhwān al-Ṣafā cannot be taken at face value, and if understood in their particular historical and sociological context they reveal more information about the dynamics of the era.

2.2 The Problem of Hostility towards Philosophy in Islam

Dimitri Gutas claims that there is not a single philosopher in the history of Islam who was ever persecuted or executed because of his philosophical views. He continues to assert that the person most frequently cited as an example to the contrary, Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī (d. 587/1191), was not executed because of his philosophical views, but because of his seizure of the position of the local '*ulamā'*' as confidant and manipulator of al-Malik al-Zāhir, the son of famous Salāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī. Gutas attempts to strengthen his argument by stating that it is totally unreasonable to assume that philosophy has been in a hostile environment in Muslim societies, since it has been practiced in various times and places throughout the Islamic world.²⁶²

While it is unfair to assume that Muslim societies have been uniquely hostile to philosophy, the argument of Gutas seems to go too far. Instead, it seems more plausible to say that, regardless of time and place, the philosophical activities of some individuals have at certain times been regarded with suspicion. As the most famous victim of persecution in the history of philosophy, Socrates comes to mind immediately. Even though it is possible to

²⁶² Dimitri Gutas, "The Study of Arabic Philosophy in the Twentieth Century: An Essay on the Historiography of Arabic Philosophy," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, v. 29, no. 1 (May, 2002), 20–21.

argue that he was not persecuted because of his philosophical views but because of his social and political defiance of the customs and beliefs of the majority,²⁶³ it is still not easy to draw a clear line between these activities and his philosophical stance in order to differentiate one from the other. Similar things may be said for the examples drawn from the history of Islam.²⁶⁴

For some scholars, the persecution philosophy faces from opposing quarters can take many forms, ranging from capital punishment to social ostracism. Between these two extremes, there are many types of persecution that can be noticed by literary and intellectual historians in their investigations of the works of the philosophers regardless of their period, nationality, or religious background.²⁶⁵ So, as a response to Gutas, it is possible to say that the hostility philosophy has suffered in the Islamic world is not unique to the Islamic world, and stating this fact does not always contain a hidden intent to humiliate Islamic civilization or belittle its accomplishments. On the contrary, if philosophical activities more often than not lead to persecution, then the phenomena of persecution might be taken as a sign for the existence of genuine philosophy.

It is possible to say that the persecution philosophy has suffered in the Islamic world never reached an intolerable point—such as capital punishment in every case—but again, it is possible to come across examples of philosophy suffering some form of persecution throughout the history of Islam. The famous fatwa of Ibn Salāḥ (d. 643/1245) against the

²⁶³ For a brief overview of Socrates, see Peter Adamson, *Classical Philosophy: a history of philosophy without any gaps* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), v. 1, 87–101.

²⁶⁴ In the cases of Şeyh Bedreddin and Molla Lütü for example, their philosophical inclinations were used against them in the process of their persecutions which ended ultimately with their executions. See, Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, *Osmanlı Toplumunda Zındıklar ve Mülhidler Yahud Dairenin Dışına Çıkanlar: (15.-17. Yüzyıllar)* (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2013), 159–267.

²⁶⁵ Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (New York: Free Press, 1952), 32–33.

study of logic and philosophy might serve as an example of this fact. According to Ibn Salāh, the ruler is responsible for protecting his people against the harms of these malignant minds by removing them from teaching positions. For him, it is also an official duty to punish people who participate in the study of logic and philosophy and burn their books.²⁶⁶ Unfortunately, Ibn Salāh cannot be considered as a unique case in his opposition to philosophy and logic. There are other scholars who expressed similar opinions against these subjects, such as Ibn Taymiyyah²⁶⁷ (d. 728/1328) and Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505).²⁶⁸ In fact, al-Ghazālī's condemnation of three philosophical points as apostasy at the end of his *Incoherence*²⁶⁹ and its repetition in his autobiography²⁷⁰ provides an ironic example which shows the uneasy place of philosophy in the Islamic world.

The literature seen in the first chapter has pointed towards some forms of opposition to philosophy in the Islamic world. In this regard, the famous article of Ignaz Goldziher still attracts the attention of the modern researchers due to its abundant use of examples. But still, its fame has not rendered it immune to criticism. According to Gutas, Goldziher wrote this

²⁶⁶ Fatih Toktaş, *İslam Düşüncesinde Felsefe Eleştirileri* (Istanbul: Klasik Yayınları, 2004), 29.

²⁶⁷ Wael b. Hallaq suggests that Ibn Taymiyyah was not only against the logic of Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, Ibn Sīnā, and the rest of the Arabic philosophers, but that he was also against the logic of the pantheistic Sūfīs, the Shī'īs, and the speculative theologians (*ahl al-kalām*). See *Ibn Taymiyya against the Greek Logicians*, trans. Wael B. Hallaq (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), xiv.

²⁶⁸ Toktaş, *Felsefe Eleştirileri*, 29–31; Ignaz Goldziher, "The Attitude of Orthodox Islam Toward the "Ancient Sciences,"" ed. and trans. Merlin L. Swartz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 204–208; *Ibn Taymiyya against the Greek Logicians*, liii–lvi.

²⁶⁹ Al-Ghazālī, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, trans. Michael E. Marmura (Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2000), 226–227.

²⁷⁰ Al-Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh min al-Dalāl* in *Majmū'at Rasā'il al-Imām al-Ghazālī*, v. 7, ed. Aḥmad Shams al-Dīn (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1997), 42.

article under the influence of early orientalist misconceptions with the addition of his own biases.²⁷¹ Gutas' objections to Goldziher might be right for the general outlook of the article; nevertheless, it is still hard to ignore his many examples which demonstrate the existence of considerable opposition to the study of philosophy and logic in the Islamic world.²⁷²

One of the examples Goldziher gives is the example of Sayf al-Dīn 'Alī ibn Muḥammad al-Āmidī (d. 631/1233). Goldziher reports that al-Āmidī was a renowned scholar in the field of religious sciences as well as in the sciences of the Greeks, namely philosophy and logic. He held a teaching position in the field of religious sciences in Egypt while spending some of his private time in the cultivation of philosophy and logic. He did not communicate the results of his spare-time activities to his students and to the public. But his leisurely activities aroused the suspicions of his colleagues, and eventually they accused him of abandoning religion for the sake of philosophy. Following this accusation, they issued a fatwa against his life and al-Āmidī saved himself only by fleeing immediately from Egypt to Syria. However, his escape did not relieve him completely, and he faced the same accusations again in Syria.²⁷³ Gutas might not take the example of al-Āmidī as narrated by Goldziher seriously, since he thinks that Goldziher's bias against the Hanbalites is well known and that it has been convincingly discussed in recent scholarship.²⁷⁴ But the same information about

²⁷¹ Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early 'Abbāsīd Society (2nd-4th/8th-10th centuries)* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 166–175; Gutas, "The Study of Arabic Philosophy," 5.

²⁷² Goldziher, "The Attitude of Orthodox Islam," 185–215.

²⁷³ Goldziher, "The Attitude of Orthodox Islam," 206–207.

²⁷⁴ Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*, 167.

al-Āmidī is found in modern Sunni sources, which cannot be accused of having anti-Hanbalites biases.²⁷⁵

In fact, al-Ghazālī's own treatment in the modern scholarship demonstrates that the notion of an Islamic hostility towards philosophy has not been abandoned completely in the process of historical understanding. But, since the open expression of this notion is immediately considered a form of Orientalism, which is "a loaded term in Arabic and Islamic studies that easily excites passions,"²⁷⁶ it manifests itself rather latently. The cause of its latent existence is not necessarily related to the existence of biases or prejudices in the scholarship. Instead, the notion of an Islamic hostility to philosophy cannot be expressed openly because of the current negative attitudes towards Orientalist scholarship. Yet it cannot be completely abandoned either because of its usefulness in the interpretation of some historical facts. Thus it remains, but rarely in an explicit fashion. The work produced by Alexander Treiger, a student of Dimitri Gutas, can be taken as one example of this scholarship²⁷⁷ to support this argument.

According to Treiger, for the last two decades or so, a paradigm shift in Ghazālīan studies has been taking place, and as a result a new consensus is now emerging. The new consensus asserts that instead of being a fierce enemy of philosophy, al-Ghazālī was a radical religious reformer who embraced and integrated the philosophy of Ibn Sīnā into his

²⁷⁵ Emrullah Yüksel, "Āmidī, Seyfeddin," *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi*, İstanbul, 1991, v. 3, 57.

²⁷⁶ Gutas, "The Study of Arabic Philosophy," 8.

²⁷⁷ Here, I have in mind what Kenneth Garden calls the revisionist scholarship about al-Ghazālī. See Kenneth Garden, *The First Islamic Reviver: Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī and His Revival of the Religious Sciences* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 5–7.

theological agenda.²⁷⁸ In contribution to the new paradigm, Treiger argues that al-Ghazālī derives much of his technical terminology from philosophy in general, and from the philosophy of Ibn Sīnā in particular. In fact, for Treiger, al-Ghazālī endorses many philosophical teachings in some of his works while openly rejecting the same teachings in others.²⁷⁹ But if the new paradigm is correct in its interpretation of al-Ghazālī, then “what do we make of his refutation of Avicennian philosophy, including his noetic, in his celebrated *Precipitance of the Philosophers (Tahāfut al-falāsifa)*?”²⁸⁰ Treiger tries to give an answer to this question in two steps.

In the first step, he argues that *Tahāfut* is a polemical work written for the theologians (*mutakallimūn*), about whom al-Ghazālī always speaks with abhorrence and whose status he reduces to the rank of the common people (*‘awamm*). The book’s nature is that of *kalām*, which aims to protect the creed of the commoners (*‘aqīdat al-‘awamm*), and it does not include al-Ghazālī’s own esoteric ideas. For them, al-Ghazālī urges his readers to look to his other books.²⁸¹ For Treiger, *Tahāfut* also serves as an alibi for al-Ghazālī, so that he can claim that he rejected philosophy and its harmful influence by detaching himself from the philosophers.²⁸² After showing that al-Ghazālī embraced in some of his other works ideas that he had refuted in *Tahāfut*, Treiger asserts that the book is a “pseudo-refutation.”²⁸³

²⁷⁸ Alexander Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge in Islamic Thought: al-Ghazālī’s theory of mystical cognition and its Avicennian foundation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 4.

²⁷⁹ Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge*, 81.

²⁸⁰ Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge*, 81.

²⁸¹ Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge*, 95.

²⁸² Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge*, 96.

²⁸³ Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge*, 81–93.

In the second step, Treiger shows that al-Ghazālī's discourse of opposition to philosophy does not originate in his own discontent with philosophy, but that it is primarily caused by external factors. Treiger does this by situating al-Ghazālī's criticism of philosophy in a biographical context in terms of what is known as the Nishapur controversy. The main accusation al-Ghazālī faced during this controversy, which was started by a group of the Hānafi and Shāfi'ī scholar of Nishapur in the year of 1006-7 (500h.), was that he was heavily dependent on the ideas of the philosophers and promoted philosophical, heretical, and Zoroastrian doctrines in his works.²⁸⁴ At first, al-Ghazālī denied the accusation and rejected that philosophy had influenced his writings in any way. Later, however, he tried to justify his use of philosophy by claiming that the use of philosophy was legitimate and even beneficial to Muslim society so long as it was carried out by an expert scholar (like al-Ghazālī himself). He compared himself to an expert snake charmer who extracts the theriac or the antidote from the snake for the benefit of the community. Like the snake charmer, al-Ghazālī was extracting the antidote from philosophy as a kind of spiritual medicine which was heavily needed in his time for the revival of Islam and the healing of the Muslim community. Al-Ghazālī also claimed that the source of the material he relied on was not philosophy, but the divine knowledge which had been received by divine men throughout human history. He claimed that the philosophers took it from them, and later made it their own.²⁸⁵

Treiger concludes that al-Ghazālī was a clandestine sympathizer and popularizer of philosophy who accepted even the most radical philosophical doctrines. He was one of the greatest popularizers of philosophy in medieval Islam, a kind of Trojan horse whose influence resulted in a deep philosophical transformation of Islamic thought in almost every discipline. For Treiger, al-Ghazālī tried to accomplish his aims by camouflaging philosophical ideas with

²⁸⁴ Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge*, 96.

²⁸⁵ Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge*, 101.

a mystical framework reminiscent of Sufism. But in fact, they were taken from the philosophers, repackaged with mystical terminology, sanctioned with the authority of the prophets, and then served to common use of the public.²⁸⁶

It seems that Goldziher rightly points to the strategy which according to Treiger was employed by al-Ghazālī when he says that “it is easily understandable why people who wanted to protect their reputations concealed their philosophical studies and pursued them under the guise of some discipline that had better standing.”²⁸⁷ But rather than al-Ghazālī, Goldziher has in mind here Muḥammad b. ‘Alī al-Tayyib of Basra (d. 436) who spent a considerable amount of time on the study of philosophy. However, in order to protect himself from the wrath of his contemporaries, he did not declare himself openly as a philosopher and presented his ideas in the form of theology (*kalām*), a science which was considered, again with certain reservation by some, an organic product of Islamic soil.²⁸⁸

Based on these remarks, it is possible to say that some of those who participated in the study of the ancient sciences in the Islamic world experienced the fear of persecution. As a result, they used certain mechanisms of deception in order to conceal their participation in these activities. Without acknowledging this fact, it is not easy to understand the journey of philosophy in the Islamic world over the course of history. The case of al-Ghazālī, bearing in mind the accomplishments of the revisionist approach discussed in the previous chapter, presents itself as a strong example in the illustration of this claim.

2.3 al-Ghazālī’s Reliance on the Philosophy of Ibn Sīnā

²⁸⁶ Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge*, 102–104.

²⁸⁷ Goldziher, “The Attitude of Orthodox Islam,” 190.

²⁸⁸ Goldziher, “The Attitude of Orthodox Islam,” 190.

The principal aim of this study is to show that *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* were one of the major philosophical influences on al-Ghazālī's thought. However, since recent scholarship has put all the emphasis on Ibn Sīnā's works as the main philosophical influence on al-Ghazālī, it will be appropriate to devote some space to discuss this matter.

Richard M. Frank has published two monographs examining Ibn Sīnā's influence on al-Ghazālī. In the first one, *Creation and the Cosmic System: al-Ghazālī and Avicenna*, Frank claims that al-Ghazālī closely follows Ibn Sīnā concerning God's relation to the cosmos, and this puts his theology in fundamental opposition to the classical Ash'arite tradition.²⁸⁹ While Frank acknowledges that al-Ghazālī objects to Ibn Sīnā's philosophy on several points, he argues that the theses of Ibn Sīnā al-Ghazālī rejects are relatively tame and inconsequential compared to the ones he incorporates into his own theology.²⁹⁰

Frank's second book, *Al-Ghazālī and the Ash'arite School*, can be read as a further explication of the thesis of his first book. With this book, Frank tries to show that even though al-Ghazālī associated himself with Ash'arism on a general or elementary level regarding the teaching and the instruction of religious doctrine, there is no evidence that he held the traditional doctrine of Ash'arism as his own personal school (*madhhab*).²⁹¹ He does this partly by comparing the works of the earlier Ash'arites with al-Ghazālī's works, and partly by chronologically analyzing the topical and linguistic changes in al-Ghazālī's own works. Frank tells his readers that the texts cited and examined in this second book also support his

²⁸⁹ Richard M. Frank, *Creation and the Cosmic System: al-Ghazālī and Avicenna* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1992), 11.

²⁹⁰ Frank, *Creation and the Cosmic System*, 86.

²⁹¹ Richard M. Frank, *Al-Ghazālī and the Ash'arite School* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1994), 101.

interpretation of al-Ghazālī as presented in the first book.²⁹² Ibn Sīnā is not as central a figure of investigating in this book as he is in the first one, but it is possible to assume that, for Frank, what al-Ghazālī holds as his own *madhhab* with the move he makes from the traditional Ash‘arism is a systematic theology built on the results of the philosophy of Ibn Sīnā.

It has been seen in the first chapter that the authenticity of some works attributed to al-Ghazālī is an issue that still attracts the attention of scholars as one of the matters of debate in Ghazalian studies. In the earlier parts of the twentieth century, scholars like Montgomery Watt and Hava Lazarus-Yafeh suggested that the philosophical content of a particular work automatically qualifies it as inauthentic. However, Frank Griffel has recently offered an argument to the contrary. Griffel thinks that al-Ghazālī’s theology and philosophy are a particular kind of Avicennism, and that the authenticity of some of his works like *Risālah al-Ladunniyah* (*The Epistle on Intimate Knowledge*), whose content is philosophical, cannot be determined without a thorough understanding of the nature of his Avicennism.²⁹³

Through textual comparison and analysis, Alexander Treiger tries to prove that al-Ghazālī built his theory of mystical cognition on elements he borrowed from the philosophy of Ibn Sīnā. This is natural, since he is the student of Dimitri Gutas, who thinks that the defining moment for the later developments in Islamic thought was the translation movement of the Greek heritage and its incorporation and appropriation into Arabic through the peripatetic (*mashshā’*) tradition in general, and Ibn Sīnā in particular.²⁹⁴ But Gutas is not the only source of influence in the construction of Treiger’s argument. Treiger also refers to Robert Wisnovsky who is renowned as one of the leading experts of Ibn Sīnā’s thought.

²⁹² Frank, *al-Ghazālī and the Ash‘arite School*, 4.

²⁹³ Frank Griffel, *al-Ghazālī’s Philosophical Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 14.

²⁹⁴ Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*, 6.

Robert Wisnovsky agrees with the revisionist approach and states that the portrayal of al-Ghazālī as the defender of Islamic orthodoxy against philosophy is a distortion of earlier Western scholarship. In fact, Wisnovsky continues, it is well known by some that al-Ghazālī's importance in the history of Islamic thought lies in his meticulous incorporation of basic metaphysical doctrines into the Sunni theology.²⁹⁵ After these doctrinal changes in Sunni theology, the two disciplines of philosophy and theology became almost inseparable from each other.²⁹⁶ This moment in the historiography of Islamic thought serves as the dividing line between the earlier scholars (*mutaqaddimūn*) and the later scholars (*muta'ahhirūn*). Al-Ghazālī is usually considered to be the only figure of importance in this line of scholars. Wisnovsky, however, disagrees and asserts that the incorporation of philosophy into Sunnī theology did not happen because of the lone struggle of al-Ghazālī, but was part of a broader trend that had begun during the lifetime of Ibn Sīnā and accelerated after his death in 1037. Because of this, Wisnovsky objects to the general consideration and claims that these doctrinal changes are Avicennian rather than Ghazalian.²⁹⁷

The influence of Ibn Sīnā on Islamic intellectual history in general and on al-Ghazālī in particular cannot be denied, and it is not the intention of this section to do so. But giving all the credit to Ibn Sīnā alone and considering him as the sole fountainhead of all later developments in Islamic thought is to unfairly exaggerate his importance. Even Dimitri Gutas accepts the current shortcomings of Avicennian studies by noting several issues regarding Ibn Sīnā's sources and influences. According to Gutas, there is not yet any basis to situate Ibn Sīnā in his immediate intellectual surroundings because of the lack of studies on his

²⁹⁵ Robert Wisnovsky, "One Aspect of Avicennian Turn in Sunnī Theology," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*, v. 14, 2004, 65.

²⁹⁶ Wisnovsky, "One Aspect," 100.

²⁹⁷ Wisnovsky, "One Aspect," 65.

predecessors and successors, and there has not been any critical investigation of the precise number and nature of his works that the modern students of Ibn Sīnā can consult without being confronted by hindering presuppositions and biased attitudes.²⁹⁸ Given the accuracy of Gutas' characterization of the state of the field, there is something problematic in the assertion that Ibn Sīnā is the most influential figure in Islamic thought in all of its various aspects.

Without dwelling overlong on the precise extent of Ibn Sīnā's influence, suffice it to say that one of the underlying assumptions of this study is that one aspect of the problem of determining the sources and their continuity in the thought of a particular thinker is his deliberate attempt to deny their influence on his thought. In our case, the example is al-Ghazālī. But hiding one's sources and presenting oneself as an original contributor to a certain line of thought does not seem to have been a rare practice in the period corresponding more or less to the timeframe of this study. Looking at the autobiography of Ibn Sīnā and attempting to understand his relation to *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* will help illustrate this argument.

2.4 Ibn Sīnā and Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'

Ibn Sīnā rarely expressed his indebtedness towards those of his predecessors and contemporaries from whom he had learned, since he wanted to be remembered as an autodidact gifted with extraordinary intellectual faculties.²⁹⁹ Towards the beginning of his autobiography, he acknowledges the fact that his father had accepted the invitation of the Fātimīds of Egypt and was known as a member of the Ismā'īlī sect. His father and his father's friends, he recalls, used to talk in their regular gatherings about the soul and the intellect in

²⁹⁸ Dimitri Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition: Introduction to Reading Avicenna's Philosophical Works* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2014), xxii–xxiii.

²⁹⁹ Dimitri Gutas, "Avicenna's 'Madhab' With an Appendix on the Question of His Date of Birth," *Quaderni di Studi Arabi*, vol. 5/6, Gli Arabi nella Storia: Tanti Popoli una Sola Civiltà, 1987-1988, 329.

their own special manner while the young Ibn Sīnā used to listen to their conversations attentively. Here, he is not making an exception to his habits of not talking about his youth since in the following lines he continues to say that he did not find their account plausible, and that his mind did not accept their invitation even though they were insistent in their efforts to convert him to their cause.³⁰⁰

It is intriguing to hear from Ibn Sīnā that his father and his friends used to talk about the soul and the intellect in their own special manner. Unfortunately though, he does not give any further information about the nature of their talks or their source or sources of information about these matters. However, there is an interesting footnote in Gohlman's edition of the autobiography which says from the mouth of Ibn Sīnā that his father used to study and ponder over *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā* and that he did the same with his father from time to time.³⁰¹ Because this part of the autobiography exists only in the *Tatimmat Ṣiwān al-Ḥikmah* by Ibn Funduq al-Bayhaqī (d. 565/1170)³⁰² and in another manuscript he consulted,³⁰³ Gohlman prefers to give it in the footnote and not in the main text he constructed.³⁰⁴

This information given by al-Bayhaqī might be seen as offering a crucial insight into Ibn Sīnā's intellectual leanings. But Dimitri Gutas sees it as one of the earliest examples of distortion concerning Ibn Sīnā's life and work.³⁰⁵ As the leading authority in the field, Gutas'

³⁰⁰ William E. Gohlman, *The Life of Ibn Sina: A Critical Edition and Annotated Translation* (Albany: State University of New York, 1974), 19; Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition*, 12–13.

³⁰¹ Gohlman, *The Life of Ibn Sina*, 21.

³⁰² Zāhir al-Dīn al-Bayhaqī, *Tārīkh Ḥukamā' al-Islām*, ed. by Mamdūḥ Ḥasan Muḥammad (Cairo: Maktabat al-Thaqāfah al-Dīniyah, 1996), 66.

³⁰³ Gohlman, *The Life of Ibn Sina*, p. 3. (Ahmad III, MS. 3447(6), fols. 20b–26b)

³⁰⁴ Gohlman, *The Life of Ibn Sina*, 121.

³⁰⁵ Gutas, "Avicenna's 'Madhab'," 323.

opinion presents itself as an obstacle before the acceptance of any connection between Ibn Sīnā and *Rasā'il*.

According to Gutas, al-Bayhaqī omits the paragraph in which Ibn Sīnā talks about his father's involvement with the Ismā'īlī sect and his own rejection of their teachings about the soul and the intellect, and instead inserts the passage related to *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*. For Gutas, al-Bayhaqī must have had only one source, the autobiography, regarding Ibn Sīnā's life. This is because the autobiography is the only source, and in it Ibn Sīnā does not say anything about his involvement with *Rasā'il*. In this case, the information given by al-Bayhaqī must be a baseless inference which gives false impressions about the life of Ibn Sīnā.³⁰⁶ Gutas claims that al-Bayhaqī's distorted insertion in this matter served as the source of the widely held belief that Ibn Sīnā had Ismā'īlī leanings, and consequently this belief caused the widespread myth of Ibn Sīnā's mysticism.³⁰⁷

Gutas thinks that the problem of Ibn Sīnā's *madhhab* is not in fact important for understanding his life and works since his intellectual activities and concerns surpass the level of any sectarian affiliation. But Gutas does believe that the issue must be addressed because it creates certain filters through which his life and works are interpreted, and because Ibn Sīnā explicitly refers to his engagements with *fiqh* in the autobiography.³⁰⁸

In the autobiography, Ibn Sīnā relates that before studying philosophy, he had devoted himself to the study of jurisprudence, and that during his studies he visited a certain Ismā'īl al-Zāhid regarding this science.³⁰⁹ Gohlman does not give any information about this man,

³⁰⁶ Gutas, "Avicenna's 'Madhab'," 324.

³⁰⁷ Gutas, "Avicenna's 'Madhab'," 325.

³⁰⁸ Gutas, "Avicenna's 'Madhab'," 325–326.

³⁰⁹ Gohlman, *The Life of Ibn Sina*, 21.

saying that he is not listed in the standard bibliographical dictionaries.³¹⁰ However, Gutas finds information about him in *Tārīkh Baghdād* by Khātīb al-Baghdādī, to the effect that he was a prominent Hanafī scholar in Bukhara. Based on this information, Gutas infers that the *madhhab* in which Ibn Sīnā was educated was Sunnī Hanafī.³¹¹

In order to give further support for this, Gutas continues to draw further inferences. First, he investigates Ibn Sīnā's relation with a certain Abū Bakr Aḥmad al-Baraqī. Ibn Sīnā states in his autobiography that this man lived in his neighborhood and favored jurisprudence, Qur'ānic exegesis, and asceticism. He also had a genuine interest in the philosophical sciences. Because of his interest, he asked Ibn Sīnā to comment on philosophy. Ibn Sīnā composed two books for him, one of which consisted of twenty volumes.³¹² Gutas infers from Ibn Sīnā's composition of such an enormous work for Abū Bakr that he was obliged to him, and that the source of this obligation was that there was a student-teacher relationship between them. Since al-Baraqī was a Hanafī, what he taught to Ibn Sīnā would naturally have been Hanafī jurisprudence.³¹³

Then, in Gutas' account, Ibn Sīnā leaves Bukhara after the fall of the Sāmānids (389/999) and goes to the Hwarzamshah's court. Gutas asserts that both of these dynasties held Hanafism as their legal school.³¹⁴ Ibn Sīnā's subsequent move was to the court of Qābūs of Jurjān (d. 403/1013), who was known by then for his aggressive policies of persecution

³¹⁰ Gohlman, *The Life of Ibn Sina*, 121.

³¹¹ Gutas, "Avicenna's 'Madhab'," 326–327.

³¹² Gohlman, *The Life of Ibn Sina*, 39; Gutas, "Avicenna's 'Madhab'," 328.

³¹³ Gutas, "Avicenna's 'Madhab'," 329.

³¹⁴ Gutas, "Avicenna's 'Madhab'," 330.

against the Shi‘a and the Mu‘tazila. So, according to Gutas, if Ibn Sīnā were not a Sunnī he would not have sought shelter in these regions.³¹⁵

Another fact which Gutas uses to support his argument is that Ibn Sīnā used to drink wine and did not appear to try to hide his drinking activities. For Gutas, Ibn Sīnā would have justified his participation in drinking sessions on the grounds that he belonged to the Hanafī School. As for the other alternatives, Gutas asserts that he could not have been a Hanbalī since he satirizes the members of this school at the beginning of his *Kitāb al-Mashriqiyyīn*. He could not have been a Shāfi‘ī either since Shāfi‘ī scholars who were heavily influenced by al-Ghazālī regarded his views as heterodox. His being an Ismā‘īlī can be ruled out based on the information he gives at the beginning of the autobiography. His affiliation with the Twelvers was a later fabrication that arose during the rise of the Safavid Dynasty in the sixteenth century.³¹⁶

The expression Gutas uses for Ibn Sīnā’s *madhhab* is “Sunnī Hanafī,” and obviously this expression is a combination of both a legal tradition and a theological tradition. But Gutas uses it without making any conceptual distinction between the legal schools and the theological schools in the Islamic tradition. The evidence he brings to support his claim seems to be supporting only one part of this expression, which is his being a Hanafī. In this respect as well his evidence seems to be circumstantial. The names he chooses from the autobiography happen to be Hanafis, and this, for Gutas, is the main evidence of Ibn Sīnā’s Hanafism. Gutas does not talk about Ibn Sīnā’s father, who happened to be an Ismā‘īlī and who allowed young Ibn Sīnā to visit Ismā‘īl al-Zāhid.³¹⁷ Gutas takes Ibn Sīnā’s open

³¹⁵ Gutas, “Avicenna’s ‘Madhab’,” 331.

³¹⁶ Gutas, “Avicenna’s ‘Madhab’,” 331–332.

³¹⁷ Robert Wisnovsky, “Avicenna and the Avicennian Tradition,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy*, ed. Peter Adamson and Richard C. Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 95.

consumption of wine as proof of his Hanafism. However, in a different place, Gutas claims that Ibn Sīnā's consumption of wine was part of the additions made by the same al-Bayhaqī and used later as a tool to defame him.³¹⁸

Gutas takes the autobiography of Ibn Sīnā at face value without questioning its content. However, Ibn Sīnā's immediate denial of Ismā'ilism towards the beginning of the autobiography raises some doubts. He must have been aware of others who might accuse him of being an Ismā'īlī. His intention with the autobiography might not have been to give genuine information about this aspect of his life, but rather to author a text before someone else did and thereby assert control over the content and presentation of his intellectual development,³¹⁹ especially given that his physical and familial proximity to the Ismā'īlī sect was a well known fact. In fact, his general project of philosophy seems to be in line with the

³¹⁸ Dimitri Gutas, "Avicenna, Biography," in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater (London and New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1989), v. 3, 67.

³¹⁹ *Interpreting the Self: Autobiography in the Arabic Literary Tradition*, ed. Dwight F. Reynolds; coauthored by Kristen E. Brustad, Michael Cooperson, Jamal J. Elias, Nuha N. N. Khoury, Joseph E. Lowry, Nasser Rabbat, Dwight F. Reynolds, Devin J. Stewart and Shawkat M. Toorawa (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), 60–61. For a brief discussion about the autobiographies of three men, Ibn Sīnā, al-Ghazālī, and 'Ayn al-Qudāt al-Hamadānī, see Omid Safi, *The Politics of Knowledge in Premodern Islam: Negotiating Ideology and Religious Inquiry* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 161–162.

general framework of *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā*,³²⁰ and his choice of titles for his most important books is reminiscent of the central notions of *Rasā'il*.³²¹

Ibn Sīnā's rushed disavowal of *Rasā'il* suggests that he was aware of the stigma that it bore. It is possible to argue that the source of this stigma was the fact that *Rasā'il* was one of the texts read in the course of Ismā'īlī propagation. In line with Gutas' claim, the passage in al-Bayhaqī's *Tatimmah* might not have been genuine information given by Ibn Sīnā himself, but it nevertheless shows that *Rasā'il* and Ismā'ilism were considered as somehow connected during the era.

Ibn Sīnā's relation to *Rasā'il* is not the main issue of this study. However, his example shows that concealing this relation was not unique to al-Ghazālī, but that it was also followed by other major intellectual figures. By deliberately distancing himself from Ismā'ilism, Ibn Sīnā has become a more acceptable figure to the Sunnī majority of Islamic world over the course of history. The repercussions of his strategic move of devising his autobiography are still influential in modern scholarship, as exemplified by Dimitri Gutas. Al-Ghazālī seems to be following the same strategy as Ibn Sīnā in devising his own autobiography. Pre-modern and modern scholarship is full of works which show how successful al-Ghazālī has been in

³²⁰ İhsan Fazlıoğlu states that the most important thing for Ibn Sīnā is to direct the intellect towards God's realm by bringing its theoretical and practical faculties to perfection and by saving the soul from the material world. This, for Ibn Sīnā, is eternal happiness. See İhsan Fazlıoğlu, *Işk imiş her ne var Âlem'de ilim bir kil ü kâl imiş ancak: Fuzulî ne demek istedi?*, (İstanbul: Klasik Yayınları, 2011), 71.

³²¹ The titles *Al-Shifā'*, *al-Najāt*, and *al-Ishārāt wa al-Tanbīhāt* are abundant in *Rasā'il* as words. They also reflect the central notions in the story of *al-Hakīm*, who comes to the city of sick people in order to cure their souls and lead them toward salvation. See *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Safā'*, ed. Ārif Tāmīr, Beirut and Paris: Manshūrāt Uwaydāt, v. 4, 17–18.

his attempt to shape opinion about himself.³²² To understand better why they spent such efforts to hide their connection to *Rasā'il*, it might be better to say something about the general perception of the sect with which *Rasā'il* were affiliated.

2. 5 Ismā'ilism during the Era

Even though the 'Abbasids experienced problems like power struggles among the members of the royal family during the early years of their rule,³²³ it is possible to say that they were relatively successful in their attempt to maintain an efficient government for some time. Under 'Abbasid rule, the schismatic voices which had been raised mostly by the Shī'īs and which had existed ever since the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632 were effectively suppressed. The ideological policies followed by the 'Abbasids during this period drove the Shī'ī groups underground. This period is known by the Shī'īs as the period of concealment (*dawr al-satr*).³²⁴ However, the 'Abbasid government had been in a constant struggle with them from the beginning, and the underground opposition to their rule became more visible

³²² Similar to Ibn Abī Usaybiyah's assessment about the later perception of Ibn Sīnā's life, Abd al-Dā'im al-Anṣārī suggest that al-Ghazālī intentionally shaped the later perception of himself with his autobiography. For the assessment of Ibn Abī Usaybiyah see Ibn Abī Usaybiyah, *'Uyūn al-Anbā' fī Ṭabaqāt al-Aṭibba'*, ed. 'Āmir al-Najjār (al-Hay'at al-Masriyyah al-'Āmmah li al-Kutub), v. 3, 70. For al-Ghazālī see 'Abd al-Dā'im al-Anṣārī, *l'tirāfāt al-Ghazālī aw Kayfa Arrakha al-Ghazālī Nafsah* (al-Qahirah, 1971). Montgomery Watt's book, *Muslim Intellectual*, can be considered as a study in agreement with al-Ghazālī's own narration. See W. Montgomery Watt, *Muslim Intellectual: A Study of al-Ghazali* (Edinburgh: The University Press, 1971).

³²³ Nahide Bozkurt, *Abbasiler*, (Istanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Araştırmaları Merkezi, 2013), 56–58.

³²⁴ Shainool Jiwa, trans., *Towards a Shi'i Mediterranean Empire: Fatimid Egypt and the Founding of Cairo: The Reign of the Imam-caliph al-Mu'izz from Taqī al-Dīn Ahmad b. 'Alī al-Maqrīzī's Itti'āz al-hunafā' bi-akhbār al-a'imma al-Fātimiyyīn al-khulafā'* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris Publishers in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2009), 4.

year after year. One of the most enduring centers of opposition to their rule came from the Shī'ī-Ismā'īlī corners.

After the death of Ja'far al-Šādiq in 765, a division happened among the Shī'īs concerning the identity of the true imam. Ja'far's son, Ismā'il (d. 138/756), was thought to be his successor but died before his father. The majority of the Shī'īs believed that another son, Mūsā al-Kāzīm (d. 183/799), was the successor of Ja'far and that the true imams descended from this lineage. But the Ismā'īlīs accepted Ismā'il or his son Muḥammad (d. 179/795) as the last true imam.³²⁵ According to them, Muḥammad b. Ismā'il—Ja'far's grandson and the seventh imam of the Ismā'īlīs—went into hiding in order to escape from Abbasid persecution. This idea of concealment became a useful tool in their propaganda with the claim that he was the last true imam and would gloriously return at a later time as the *mahdī*. This propaganda effort spread at the hands of a highly disciplined underground movement.³²⁶

In time, however, 'Abd Allāh or 'Ubayd Allāh, who was one of the chief leaders of the propaganda effort, claimed that he was a descendent of Muḥammad b. Ismā'il and that the Ismā'īlīs should accept him as the true imam. This claim stirred strong opposition among the followers and became the cause of another division, which led to the formation of the Qarāmiṭa.³²⁷

The Qarāmiṭa first appeared at the end of the ninth century in the lower parts of Mesopotamia in Iraq. Their name comes from their first leader, Ḥamdān b. Ash'as al-Qarmat. Ḥamdān is believed to have been active during the Zanj rebellion which had lasted fourteen

³²⁵ Hugh Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates: the Islamic Near East From the Sixth to the Eleventh Century* (London and New York: Longman, 1986), 287.

³²⁶ Al-Maqrīzī, *Towards a Shi'ī Mediterranean Empire*, 4.

³²⁷ Hugh Kennedy, *The Prophets and the Age of the Caliphates*, 288.

years between 869 and 883. At some point during the rebellion, he was influenced by Ismā‘īlī propaganda and became the leading propagandist of Ismā‘īlism in the region. At the time, he was preaching and raising money in the Sawād lands of Kufa.³²⁸

Ḥamdān and his followers did not acknowledge the claim of ‘Abd Allāh, who openly declared himself as the Ismā‘īlī imam. With their rejection of ‘Abd Allāh, Ḥamdān and many other propagandists swore to wait for the return of Muḥammad b. Ismā‘īl, and they established their base in Bahrain in opposition to ‘Abd Allāh, who later became the founder of the Fātimid caliphate. In the tenth century, the Qarāmiṭa emerged as a powerful military force that led repeated attacks in Iraq and Syria and posed a considerable challenge to both the Fātimids and the ‘Abbasids.³²⁹ The Qarmaṭī movement was not limited only to Ḥamdān’s activities, and other rebellions occurring during his lifetime were also attributed to him. After his death in 906, the activities of the Ismā‘īlīs in the region were considered to be part of his movement and treated under the name of Qarāmiṭa.³³⁰

The Qarāmiṭa forces were small in number but extremely efficient in their strikes, which usually happened suddenly and without warning. They sacked cities like Basra and Kufa, thus forcing the population to leave these cities for Baghdad. The anarchy they created caused the further escalation of terror and oppression, with the undutiful attitude of the ‘Abbasid army and their unwillingness to fight against the Qarāmiṭa.³³¹ During the third

³²⁸ Hugh Kennedy, *The Prophets and the Age of the Caliphates*, 287.

³²⁹ Al-Maqrīzī, *Towards A Shi‘i Mediterranean Empire*, 5–6.

³³⁰ Sabri Hizmetli, “Karmatīler,” *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi*, Istanbul, 2001, v. 24, 510.

³³¹ Hugh Kennedy, “The Reign of al-Muqtadir (295-320/908-32): A History,” in *Crisis and Continuity at the Abbasid Court: Formal and Informal Politics in the Caliphate of al-Muqtadir (295-320/908-32)*, coauthored by Maaike Van Berkel, Nadia Maria El Cheikh, Hugh Kennedy and Letizia Osti (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013), 35–39.

decade of the tenth century, the Qarāmiṭa continued their attacks on Basra and Kufa and advanced toward the ‘Abbasid capital of Baghdad. They took control of the pilgrimage routes, ransacked Mecca, and stole the black stone of the Ka‘ba.³³²

The other offshoot of the Ismā‘īlī movement continued its activities in Syria and North Africa. They founded the Fātimid state in 909 in North Africa, conquered Egypt in 969, and established Cairo as their new capital. The Fātimids also claimed to be the rightful successors of the Prophet Muhammad. They saw themselves as the inheritors of the Muslim land. They adopted the title of Caliph, and thus broke the symbolic unity of the Muslim community. Their move, followed by other claimants to the throne, impaired the political power of the ‘Abbasids and undermined the legitimacy of their leadership.³³³

The activities of the Ismā‘īlīs also affected the Muslim empire economically. The turmoil in Iraq resulted in a decline in its international trade. The Qarāmiṭa groups had cut Baghdad’s connection with the Persian Gulf and the major cities of the Arabian Peninsula. By doing so, they disrupted the flow of goods from the Far East and South Asia to Baghdad and to Mediterranean. Meanwhile, the Fātimids promoted alternative trade routes through the Red Sea and Cairo, thus effectively redirecting the flow of trade even further. In sum, all these activities devastated the economical structure of Iraq and deteriorated the prosperity of its population.³³⁴

The Qarāmiṭa continued to be a source of trouble for the ‘Abbasids during the first half of the tenth century. But, toward the middle of the century, the destructiveness of their activities lessened. Instead, their relations with the Fātimids grew tenser in tandem with the

³³² Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 132.

³³³ Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*, 132.

³³⁴ Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies*, 136.

ever-increasing presence of the Fātimid state.³³⁵ Under these circumstances, they seemed to be anxious to make peace with the ‘Abbasids, and some of them were already serving in the ‘Abbasid army.³³⁶ Their leader, Abū Ṭāhir, promised to protect the pilgrimage roads in exchange for an annual payment from the ‘Abbasids. After the death of Abū Ṭāhir, the Qarāmiṭa consented to return the Black Stone of the Ka‘ba to Mecca. This move brought them closer to the established political order of the ‘Abbasids.³³⁷

The Fatimid presence in North Africa and especially in Egypt continued to be one of the many problems facing the ‘Abbasid caliphate. Over time, these troubles reached an insurmountable level, eventually leading to a political vacuum. The vacuum was filled by the warlike people of the distant regions of the empire. The most notable of these were the Daylamites of northern Iran, who were adherents of Twelver-Shī‘ism. They gradually expanded their power towards the capital, and finally in 945, the Sunnī Caliph was forced to accept their legitimacy and appointed their leader Ahmad as *amīr al-umarā’*. Ahmad’s family, known as the Buwayhids, established themselves as the most powerful ruling family of the era with their efficient control of the majority of the traditional territory of the empire. They

³³⁵ For their fights with the Fatimids, see, Shainool Jiwa, trans., *The Founder of Cairo: The Fatimid Imam-Caliph al-Mu‘izz and His Era: An English Translation of the Text on al-Mu‘izz from Idrīs ‘Imād al-Dīn’s ‘Uyūn al-Akhbār* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris Publishers in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2013), 234–236, 253, and 266–269.

³³⁶ For different accounts of their relation with the Fatimids, see Wilferd Madelung, “The Fatimids and the Qarmatis of Bahrayn,” in *Mediaeval Isma‘īli History and Thought*, ed. Farhad Daftary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 21–73.

³³⁷ Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates*, 291.

stayed in power for more than one hundred years until the coming of the Saljuqs in the next century.³³⁸

During the Buwayhid era, the Abbasids continued their struggle with the Fatimids. The Fatimid policy of uniting Muslim territory under an Ismā‘īlī caliphate by religious propaganda³³⁹ was the source of the endless religio-political conflicts and rivalries between them. The Fatimid claim of authority was also opposed by other dynasties, such as the Buwayhids, which derived their legitimacy from the Abbasids. Instead of engaging in military battles, the Fatimid tactic was to send secret propagandists everywhere and call Muslims to the allegiance of the Fatimid imam-caliph. The Abbasids’ response to this was to launch counter religio-political campaigns with the intention of refuting their opponents’ ‘Alid genealogy and discrediting their teachings by attributing heretical beliefs to them.³⁴⁰

The war of propaganda between the Fatimids and the Abbasids continued for decades without any military confrontation. The Fatimids gained some support in the Muslim east, with several local rulers recognizing their authority. But this support was never sufficient to secure Fatimid control over the region.³⁴¹

The Fatimids adapted themselves to the new situation when the power shifted from the Buwayhids to the Saljuqs. The founder of the Saljuq state, Tughril, entered Baghdad in 1055 with under the pretext of saving the Abbasid caliph from the yoke of the Shī‘ī Buwayhids and declared his intention to march on Fatimid Egypt. Discord within the Saljuq military and the

³³⁸ Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates*, 212–217.

³³⁹ The Fatimids called it *al-da‘wa al-hādīa*’ or the rightly-guiding mission. See Farhad Daftary, “Fatimids,” in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater, New York: Bibliotheca Persica Press, 1999, 423.

³⁴⁰ Daftary, “Fatimids,” 423.

³⁴¹ Daftary, “Fatimids,” 424.

revolt of Arslān Baṣāsīrī, a Buwayhid general who had switched to the Fatimid side after the Saljuq invasion, prevented a Saljuq expedition to Egypt.³⁴²

The Fatimids continued their propaganda in Iran with able propagandists like ‘Abd al-Malik b. ‘Attash and Nāsir-i Khusraw. ‘Abd al-Malik was responsible for the initiation of the most famous Ismā‘īlī propagandist of all time, the legendary Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ (d. 1124). After his conversion to the Fatimid version of Ismā‘īlism, he spent three years studying in Egypt. Upon his return, Ḥasan emerged as the chief propagandist of Ismā‘īlism in all of the Saljuq territory. The succession crisis after the death of the Fatimid leader al-Mustansir in 1094 gravely affected his career. Ḥasan did not recognize the legitimacy of the new imam-caliph al-Musta‘lī bi-Allāh and upheld the rights of Nizār for the throne. With the defeat of Nizār at the hand of Musta‘lī and his all-powerful vizier al-Afḍal b. Badr al-Jamālī, Ḥasan severed his relation with the Fatimids and followed an independent Nizārī-Ismā‘īlī propaganda on behalf of the absent Nizārī imam. He established a state centered in Alamut at the very heart of the Saljuq state.³⁴³ This phase of propaganda was called by the Nizārīs as the new propaganda (*al-da‘wah al-jadīdah*), thus separating them doctrinally from the old one (*al-da‘wah al-qadīmah*).³⁴⁴

Long before the establishment of the Nizārī state in Alamut, the Sunnī polemicists were already portraying the Ismā‘īlism as a secret conspiracy for the abolition of Islam. According to them, it had been founded by ‘Abd Allah b. Maymūn al-Qaddāh with the aim of destroying Islam from within. He cloaked its unbelief and atheism under its seven grades of

³⁴² Daftary, “Fatimids,” 424.

³⁴³ Farhad Daftary, *Ismailis in Medieval Muslim Societies* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris Publishers in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2005), 78–82.

³⁴⁴ Farhad Daftary, *The Ismā‘īlīs: Their history and doctrines* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 325.

initiation and pretended to be a Shi'ī working on behalf of the expected imam-mahdī, Muhammad b. Ismā'īl. Later on, his successors claimed to be the descendents of the imam and founded the Fatimid state.³⁴⁵

In addition to this, the foundation of the Nizārī state in Alamut provided new materials to be used in the propaganda wars. From Alamut, Ḥasan was following an unconventional military strategy against the Saljuqs and his other enemies. He was sending assassins to kill his opponents in the most spectacular way. The death of the assassin was certain, as was the successful completion of his mission. Their theatrical performance of killing and dying terrorized everybody and stirred a new literary campaign against them. This campaign gave rise to another legend, which is known today as the assassin legend. According to this legend, Ḥasan was charming his followers with the use of opium (*ḥashīsh*), and after making them addicted to the substance, was using them as senseless assassins in order to liquidate his enemies. The legend was extremely successful in making the Nizārī-Ismā'īlīs the most feared community in the mediaeval Islamic world. It was used to justify large-scale massacres of the Nizārīs in urban centers like Aleppo, Damascus, Qazwin, and Isfahan, and endangered the lives of many who were accused of being a Nizārī.³⁴⁶

2. 6 The Perception of Ismā'īlism During the Era

Naturally, its claim to authority and the struggle for its achievement had situated Shi'ism in opposition to those who were already in power. Leaving aside their internal

³⁴⁵ Farhad Daftary calls it "the black legend." For details, see his book, *The Assassin Legends: Myths of the Isma'īlis* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 1994), 24–27.

³⁴⁶ Daftary, *The Assassin Legends*, 31–36; Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Order of Assassins: The Struggle of the Early Nizārī Ismā'īlīs Against the Islamic World* (The Hague: Mouton and Co Publishers, 1995), 82–84 and 110–115.

conflicts, their opponents were at first the Umayyads, and then the ‘Abbasids and those who held the power in their name, more specifically the Saljuqs. Leaving aside the Umayyads,³⁴⁷ the ‘Abbasid reactions to Shī‘ī movements changed from time to time based on the policies of the caliph of the time. While one caliph could seem eager to make peace with them during his rule,³⁴⁸ another would openly declare his hostility towards them.³⁴⁹ But these changing reactions seem to have been exercised in relation with the Twelver version of Shī‘ism.³⁵⁰ The Ismā‘īlī version of Shī‘ism, however, seems from the start to have been perceived to be much more detrimental to the political and theological unity of Muslims.

This perception resulted in the waging of a literary campaign against Ismā‘īlism, and almost from the beginning derogatory accounts of it were produced for public circulation. One of the first and most enduring anti-Ismā‘īlī account was that ‘Abd Allah b. Maymūn al-Qaddāh was the real founder of the movement. According to it, even though he did not have any relation with the family of ‘Ali, al-Qaddāh founded a movement of libertinism and

³⁴⁷ For Umayyad-Shī‘ī relations, see Andrew J. Newman, *Twelver Shiism: Unity and Diversity in the Life of Islam: 632 to 1722* (Edinburgh: University Press, 2013), 19–25.

³⁴⁸ Al-Ma’mūn declared ‘Alī b. Mūsā his heir and gave him the title *al-Riḍā*. For detailed information about both of them, see Michael Cooperson, *Classical Arabic Biography: The Heirs of the Prophets in the Age of al-Ma’mūn*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 24–106.

³⁴⁹ In 851, al-Mutawakkil ordered the destruction of Imam Husayn’s grave in Karbala. For a brief treatment of the subject, see Newman, *Twelver Shiism*, 25–30.

³⁵⁰ Sumaiya A. Hamdani, *Between Revolution and State: The Path to Fatimid Statehood: Qadi al-Nu‘man and the Construction of Fatimid Legitimacy*, (London and New York: I. B. Tauris Publishers in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2006), 135–136.

atheism in order to destroy Islam and attributed it to the descendents of ‘Ali. Later on, al-Qaddāh’s descendents established the Fātimid state with these pretensions.³⁵¹

Based on this account about al-Qaddāh, the judges in Baghdad prepared an official statement in 1011 under the sponsorship of the reigning ‘Abbasid caliph al-Qādir (d. 1031) to deny the ‘Alid origin of the Fatimid rulers. Many scholars, including some Twelver Shī‘īs, served as witnesses during the public declaration of the statement.³⁵² The statement was repeated again in 1052 during the reign of the ‘Abbasid caliph al-Qā‘im (d. 1075).³⁵³

The story of al-Qaddāh was continuously repeated by later scholars.³⁵⁴ Beyond repeating it, some also added their own subjective judgments about the sect as well. These judgments clearly demonstrate the level of enmity and hatred felt by the Sunnī majority towards the sect. At the beginning of the relevant section of his book *al-Farq bayna al-Firaq*, the Ash‘arī heresiographer ‘Abd al-Qāhir b. Ṭāhir al-Baghdādī (d. 1037)³⁵⁵ boldly states the following about the Ismā‘īlīs:

³⁵¹ Daftary, *The Ismā‘īlīs*, 109–110. Daftary calls this account the “Ibn Rizām-Akhū Muhsin narrative” and speaks about it in detail. Both Ibn Rizām and Akhū Muhsin died in the tenth century.

³⁵² Daftary, *The Ismā‘īlīs*, 109. Ibn Khaldūn gives an original analysis of this account and the official statement. See his *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, trans. Franz Rosenthal (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958), v. 1, 41–47. We also learn from Ibn Khaldūn that for a whole year during the uprising of al-Basāsīrī that the Friday sermons were read in the name of the Fātimid caliphs, see page 42.

³⁵³ Farhad Daftary, *Ismaili Literature: A Bibliography of Sources and Studies* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris Publishers in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2004), 87.

³⁵⁴ Daftary, *The Ismā‘īlīs*, 109, see his note 92 on page 604.

³⁵⁵ Ethem Ruhi Fiğlalı, “Abdülkâhir el-Bağdâdî,” *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi*, İstanbul, 1998, v. 1, 245.

“Know —may God make you prosper— that the damage caused by the Bātiniyya to the Muslim sects is greater than the damage caused them by the Jews, Christians and Magians; nay, graver than the injury inflicted on them by the Materialists and other non-believing sects; nay, graver than the injury resulting to them from the Antichrist who will appear at the end of time. For those who, as a result of the missionary activities of the Bātiniyya, have been led astray ever since the inception of the mission up to the present time are more numerous than those who will be led astray by the Antichrist when he appears, since the duration of the sedition of the Antichrist will not exceed forty days. But the vices of the Bātiniyya are more numerous than the sand-grains or the raindrops.”³⁵⁶

The rise of Saljūq power during the second part of the eleventh century led them to employ tools to legitimize their quest for more power. At first, they legitimized their march towards Baghdad with the claim of saving the caliph from the yoke of the Buwayhids, who were adherents of the Twelver version of Shī‘ism. Their relatively quick removal of the Buwayhids from power seemed to leave them without a serious opponent. But in order to represent themselves as the defenders of the Sunnī orthodoxy, their primary claim to

³⁵⁶ Abu Maṣṣūr ‘Abd-al-Qāhir ibn Ṭāhir al-Baghdādī, *Moslem Schisms and Sects (al-Fark Bain al-Firak): Being the History of the Various Philosophic Systems Developed in Islam*, part II, trans. Abraham S. Halkin, (Tel-Aviv: Palestine Publishing Co. Ltd, 1935), 107–108. For the original text in Arabic, see *Kitāb al-Farq bayna al-Firaq wa bayān al-Firqah al-Nājiyyah minhum*, Egypt: Maṭba‘at al-Ma‘ārif, (n.d), 265–266. See also Daftary, *The Assassin Legends*, 26. Shahristānī (d. 1153) says that the most famous epithet for the Ismā‘īlīs’ is *al-Baṭiniyyah* because of their teaching that every external (*ẓāhir*) has an internal (*bāṭin*). On this, see Abū al-Fath Muhammad b. ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Shahristānī, *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, ed. Muhammad ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Fāḍilī, (Beirut: al-Maktabat al-‘Asriyyah, 2006), 157. For the different names of the sect, also see Nizām al-Mulk, *The Book of Government or Rules for Kings: The Siyāsat-nāma or Siyar al-Mulūk*, trans. Hubert Darke (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), 238; Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Faḍā’ih al-Bātiniyyah*, ed. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Badawi (Cairo: Dār al-Qawmiyyah li al-Ṭibā‘ah wa al-Nashr), 11–17.

legitimacy, they needed the threat of heretical schemes against the true version of religion. Luckily for them, the opposition they needed was already there. It was the Ismāʿīlism propagated by the Fātimids of Egypt and by the Nizārīs of Alamut.³⁵⁷

One of the most powerful enemies of the Ismāʿīlīs at the time was the all-powerful vizier of the Saljūqs, Nizām al-Mulk (d. 1092).³⁵⁸ He served as the effective ruler of the Saljūq state for more than twenty years during the reigns of several Saljūq sultans.³⁵⁹ Endowed with this immense power, he became the pivotal figure in the fight against the Ismāʿīlīs, especially the Nizārī branch of Ismāʿīlism during the reign of Malikshāh (1072-1092).³⁶⁰ He was the person behind the state-sponsored systematization of the various religious disciplines and their propagation as approved version of Islam through the network of madrasas known by his name, the Nizāmiya. One of the objectives of this knowledge-production system was to provide materials for the literary and intellectual campaign against the Ismāʿīlīs.³⁶¹ In addition to this literary campaign, he sent several expeditions to destroy their strongholds in northern Iran. It has been argued that his assassination might have been the result of his obsession with wiping the Ismāʿīlī sect from the face of the Earth, and thus

³⁵⁷ Omid Safi, *The Politics of Knowledge in Premodern Islam*, xxiv.

³⁵⁸ Abdülkerim Özeydin, "Nizāmülmülk," *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi*, Istanbul, 2007, v. 33, 194–196.

³⁵⁹ Carole Hillenbrand, "Nizām al-Mulk: A Maverick Vizier," in *The Age of the Seljuqs*, ed. Edmund Herzig and Sarah Stewart (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2015), 29–40.

³⁶⁰ Özeydin, "Nizāmülmülk," 194. For Ismāʿīlī-Saljūqs relation see Farhad Daftary, "Ismaili-Seljuq Relations: Conflict and Stalemate," in *The Age of the Seljuqs*, eds. Edmund Herzig and Sarah Stewart, London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2015, 41–57; Carole Hillenbrand, "The Power Struggle Between the Saljuqs and the Ismāʿilis of Alamut, 487-518/1094-1124: The Saljuq Perspective," in *Mediaeval Ismaʿili History and Thought*, ed. Farhad Daftary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 205–220.

³⁶¹ Omid Safi, *The Politics of Knowledge in Premodern Islam*, xxiv.

perpetrated by the Ismā‘īlīs who needed to get rid of this powerful enemy.³⁶² According to some sources, the Ismā‘īlīs of Alamut selected him as the first target for their long series of assassinations. Upon receiving the news of Nizām al-Mulk’s assassination by the hands of his *fidāyīs*,³⁶³ Ḥasan-i Šabbāḥ supposedly said that “the killing of this devil is the beginning of bliss.”³⁶⁴

As the ideologist of the state,³⁶⁵ Nizām al-Mulk devoted several chapters of his famous *Siyāsat-Nāma* to the Ismā‘īlī movement and to its offshoots. He begins his treatment of these movements by denouncing them as the enemies of state with the following words:

“Never has there been a more vile, more perverted or more irreligious crowd than these people, who behind walls are plotting harm to this country and seeking to destroy the religion. Their ears are alert for the sounds of sedition and their eyes are open for signs of the evil eye. If in any way (we take refuge with Allah!) through some celestial accident any misfortune should befall this victorious empire (may Allah The Mighty strengthen it) these dogs will emerge from their hiding places, and will revolt against this empire and support the claims of the Shi‘a. The greatest reinforcement of their strength comes from the Rafidis and Khurramdins, and as far as they can they will leave nothing undone in the pursuit of mischief, murder and heresy. In their speech they claim to be Muslims, but in reality they act like unbelievers; their inward purposes are at

³⁶² Carole Hillenbrand, “1092: A Murderous Year,” in *Proceedings of the 14th Congress of the Union Européenne des Arabisants et Islamisants*, Budapest, 1995, 285–286.

³⁶³ Fidāyīs are the people who risk their lives for their causes.

³⁶⁴ Bernard Lewis, *The Assassins: A Radical Sect in Islam* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1967), 47. For detailed information about Nizām al-Mulk and an alternative theory for his death, see Omid Safi, *The Politics of Knowledge in Premodern Islam*, 43–81.

³⁶⁵ Mehmet Taha Ayar, “Sunuş,” in his Turkish translation of *Siyasetname* (Istanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2009), viii.

variance with their outward appearances; their words are the opposite of their deeds. The religion of Muhammad The Elect (may Allah pray for him and bless him) has no more vile enemy than them, and the kingdom of The Master of the World has no worse opponent.”³⁶⁶

After this introduction, Nizām al-Mulk warns the Sultan that several adherents of Ismā‘īlism had already infiltrated the state offices and were in the process of changing its policies in favor of the Shī‘īs. For Nizām al-Mulk, they were even trying to convince the Sultan to overthrow the house of the ‘Abbasids completely.³⁶⁷

Nizām al-Mulk also repeats the old story of al-Qaddāh as the founder of the movement³⁶⁸ and relates in detail the spread of the movement in Iran.³⁶⁹ At the end of his account, Nizām al-Mulk warns the Sultan against them in a menacing tone. He states that they are conspiring against the state and the religion by “digging a pit, and beating a drum beneath a blanket.” He continues:

“One day The Master of the World (may Allah extend his reign) will recall the words of his slave, when they begin to throw friends and nobles into this pit, when the sound of their drum reaches the ears of all, and when their evil practices and intrigues are exposed; for then will the Muslims suffer calamity, the country will be thrown into disorder, and the religion will descend into the abyss (of heresy).”³⁷⁰

Nizām al-Mulk did not undertake this literary campaign against the Ismā‘īlīs alone. He also sponsored and employed other scholars during the process. In return for the sponsorships

³⁶⁶ Nizām al-Mulk, *The Book of Government*, 193–194.

³⁶⁷ Nizām al-Mulk, *The Book of Government*, 194.

³⁶⁸ Nizām al-Mulk, *The Book of Government*, 214.

³⁶⁹ Nizām al-Mulk, *The Book of Government*, 193–245.

³⁷⁰ Nizām al-Mulk, *The Book of Government*, 245.

and teaching positions he provided, Nizām al-Mulk expected them to take part in the war of ideology.³⁷¹ His support for al-Juwaynī (d. 1085)³⁷² and for al-Ghazālī can be considered as the examples of this pattern.

Al-Ghazālī also wrote several works against the Ismā‘īlī’s during his lifetime.³⁷³ The most elaborate of these works was the *Faḍā’ih al-Bāṭiniyyah wa-Faḍā’il al-Mustazhiriyyah* (*Infamies of the Batinis and Virtues of the Mustazhiris*). He was commissioned to write this book by the ‘Abbasid caliph al-Mustazhir (d. 1118).³⁷⁴ This shows that even after the death of his original benefactor, Nizām al-Mulk, al-Ghazālī was still participating in the literary fight against the Ismā‘īlīs.

Farhad Daftary states that the title of al-Ghazālī’s book implies his enmity towards the Ismā‘īlīs right from the beginning. Al-Ghazālī’s uses the word *bāṭinī*, meaning esotericist, to designate the adherents of the sect. By using this term, al-Ghazālī already assumes that the adherents of the sect dispense with the commands and prohibitions of religion. More than this, for Daftary, al-Ghazālī fabricated his own version of Ismā‘īlī system of graded initiation in this work. According to this version, the initiation process of the Ismā‘īlīs ended in the

³⁷¹ For a brief discussion of Nizām al-Mulk’s agenda, see Kenneth Garden, *The First Islamic Reviver: Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī and His Revival of the Religious Sciences* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 19–22.

³⁷² For Juwaynī, see Abdülazîm ed-Dîb, “Cüveynî, İmâmü’l-Haremeyn,” *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi*, Istanbul, 1993, v. 8, 141–144. For Juwaynī’s ideological support of the Saljuqs and Nizām al-Mulk, see Wael B. Hallaq, “Caliphs, Jurists and the Saljuqs in the Political Thought of Juwaynī,” *The Muslim World*, 1984, v. 74, no. 1, 26–41; Özgür Kavak, “İki Âlim, İki Halife Adayı: Cüveynî’nin Nizâmülmülk’ü, Gazzâlî’nin Müstazhir’i,” *Dîvân: Disiplinlerarası Çalışmalar Dergisi*, 2011/2012, v. 16, no. 31, 35–66.

³⁷³ Daftary, *Ismaili Literature*, 177.

³⁷⁴ Farouk Mitha, *Al-Ghazālī and the Ismailis: A Debate on Reason and Authority in Medieval Islam* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2001), 2.

ultimate stage of atheism (*al-balāgh al-akbar*).³⁷⁵ Given the fame and influence of al-Ghazālī, Daftary states, the later Sunnī writers adopted his presentation, and blended it with the earlier story of al-Qaddāh.³⁷⁶

The level of enmity displayed towards the Ismā‘īlīs in the writings of powerful politicians and scholars demonstrates that being associated with the Ismā‘īlī sect was a source of danger for one’s well-being during the time. The label of being a *bāṭinī* aroused the suspicions of public officials and private individuals. Accusing one of being a sympathizer of the sect was an easy and effective way of discrediting him.³⁷⁷ Given the secret and discreet nature of Ismā‘īlī activities, one way of associating a person with them was to argue for his involvement with Ismā‘īlī literature. And *Rasā’il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā*’ has been considered by many as part of this literature.

2. 7 Rasā’il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’ and Ismā‘īlism

The authors of *Rasā’il*, the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’, are considered to have been a group of people who were active during the tenth century in Iraq. Their main base is thought to have been the southern Iraqi city of Basra. It is also assumed that they maintained a considerable presence in Baghdad, the capital of the ‘Abbasids caliphate. They always conducted their activities in secret by anonymously circulating their *Rasā’il*.³⁷⁸ They were also successful in

³⁷⁵ Al-Ghazālī, *Fadā’ih*, 32.

³⁷⁶ Daftary, *Ismaili Literature*, 87–88. Al-Sayyid al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī (d. 1413) repeats the same accounts and their different names in his *Sharh al-Mavaqif*. See Seyyid Şerîf Cürçânî, *Şerhu’l-Mevâkıf: Mevâkıf Şerhi* (Metin-Çeviri), tr. Ömer Türker (Istanbul: Türkiye Yazma Eserler Kurumu Başkanlığı Yayınları, 2015), v. 3, 776–787.

³⁷⁷ Hugh Kennedy, “The Reign of al-Muqtadir,” 36.

³⁷⁸ A. L. Tibawi, “Ikhwān as-Safā and Their *Rasā’il*: A Critical Review of a Century and a Half of Research,” *The Islamic Quarterly*, 1955, v. 2, no. 1, 29.

leaving almost no information about their identity in *Rasā'il*³⁷⁹ and in the other literary sources of the time. These facts make the level of current information about their identity next to nothing.³⁸⁰ Thus, the question of their identity still remains unsettled.³⁸¹

Since there is almost no information about their identity, their sectarian affiliation continues to be a source of scholarly debate as well. However, this debate mostly turns around the problem of determining whether or not they adhered to the Ismā'īlī sect. This is because of the fact that in any case there is a connection between them and the Ismā'īlism,³⁸² and the Ismā'īlī sect influenced the structure and the vocabulary of their *Rasā'il* more than any other sect.³⁸³ Historically as well, the Ismā'īlīs were the sect which paid the greatest respect to the *Rasā'il* and used them extensively in their sectarian and literary activities.³⁸⁴

³⁷⁹ Godefroid de Callatay, *Ikhwān al-Safā': A Brotherhood of Idealists on the Fringe of Orthodox Islam* (Oxford: One World Press, 2005), 3–4.

³⁸⁰ The most common reference given about their identity is Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīdī (d. 1023). See his book, *Kitāb al-Imtā' wa'l-mu'ānasah*, ed. Aḥmad Amīn and Aḥmad al-Zayn (Beirut and Sidon: Manshūrāt al-Maktabah al-'Aşriyyah, 1953), v. 2, 2–6.

³⁸¹ Nader El-Bizri, "Foreword," in *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity: On the Natural Sciences: An Arabic Critical Edition and English Translation of Epistles 15-21*, ed. and tr. Carmela Baffioni, (Oxford: Oxford University Press in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2013) xvii.

³⁸² Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines: Conceptions of Nature and Methods Used For Its Study The Ikhwān al-Safā', al-Bīrūnī, and Ibn Sīnā* (Great Britain: Thames and Hudson, 1978), 25–30 and 35–37.

³⁸³ Ian Richard Netton, *Muslim Neoplatonists: An Introduction to the Thought of the Brethren of Purity (Ikhwān al-Safā')* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1982), 96.

³⁸⁴ Husain F. Hamdānī, "Rasā'il Ikhwān as-Safā in the Literature of the Ismā'īlī Taiyibī Da'wat," *Der Islam*, 1932, v. 20, 281–300. It seems that Ibn Taymiyya also considered the *Rasā'il* as part of the Ismaili literature. See Yahya Jean Michot, "Misled and Misleading... Yet Central in Their Influence: Ibn Taymiyya's Views on the

Modern Ismāʿīlī literary sources also claim *Rasāʾil* as one of their own. According to W. Ivanow, *Rasāʾil* were not the work of a single scholar, but produced by a group of scholars under the patronage of the Fātimids in connection with the philosophy of Ismāʿīlism.³⁸⁵ In a later publication, Abbas Hamdani supports this connection with the assertion that the Fātimid connection of *Rasāʾil* is no longer disputed.³⁸⁶ Ismail Poonawala claims that *Rasāʾil* were probably composed during the tenth century by a group of Qarmatī propagandists.³⁸⁷ Poonawala acknowledges the controversy regarding the authorship and date of composition but still states that their Ismāʿīlī character seems indisputable.³⁸⁸ Farhad Daftary gives *Rasāʾil* under the section of primary sources of Ismāʿīlism with the claim that modern scholarship has acknowledged the Ismāʿīlī affiliation of its authors.³⁸⁹ *An Anthology of Ismaili Literature* as well includes materials taken from *Rasāʾil*.³⁹⁰

Even today, the Ismāʿīlīs take the initiative in the preservation, publication, and the study of *Rasāʾil*. Ismāʿīlī institutions spend their resources systematically to better the

Ikhwān al-Safāʾ,” in *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity: The Ikhwān al-Safāʾ and Their Rasāʾil: An Introduction*, ed. Nader El-Bizri (Oxford: Oxford University Press in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2008), 142–145.

³⁸⁵ Wladimir Ivanow, *A Guide to Ismaili Literature* (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1933), 30–31.

³⁸⁶ Abbas Hamdani, “An Early Fātimid Source on the Time and Authorship of the “*Rasāʾil* Ikhwān al-Safāʾ,”” *Arabica*, 1979, T. 26, fasc. 1, 62.

³⁸⁷ Ismail K. Poonawala, *Biobibliography of Ismāʿīlī Literature* (Malibu: Undena Publications, 1977), 20.

³⁸⁸ Poonawala, *Biobibliography*, 374.

³⁸⁹ Farhad Daftary, *Ismaili Literature* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris Publishers in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2004), 166.

³⁹⁰ *An Anthology of Ismaili Literature: A Shiʿi Vision of Islam*, ed. Herman Landolt, Samira Sheikh and Kutub Kassam (London and New York: I. B. Tauris Publishers in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2008), 113–118.

publication of *Rasā'il* and make them available for a wider audience. The Institute of Ismaili Studies in London is a famous example of this initiative.

For the purpose of this study, it is more important to show that the authors of *Rasā'il* were considered as adherents of the Ismā'īlism in the immediate surroundings of al-Ghazālī. When talking about the dangers of the Ismā'īlī threat to the state, Nizām al-Mulk relates how 'Abd Allah b. Maymūn al-Qaddāh converted Mubarak, who was the servant of Muhammad b. Ismā'īl. According to Nizām al-Mulk, 'Abd Allah "made several statements, introducing obscure words from the language of the imams, mixed up with sayings of the naturalists and utterances of the philosophers, and consisting largely of mention of The Prophet and the angels, the tablet and pen, and heaven and the throne"³⁹¹ in order to convert Mubarak to his evil scheme. Nizām al-Mulk does not tell anything about the sources of these statements, but they clearly represent the main themes and content of *Rasā'il*.

Al-Ghazālī himself seems to agree with the position that the authors of *Rasā'il* were adherents of Ismā'īlism. The school of thought he deals with in his *Deliverer* under the title of the *Ta'līmiyyah* (Authoritative Instruction) is clearly Ismā'īlism, especially its Nizārī branch, since the formulator of the doctrine of *ta'līm* is Ḥasan-i Šabbāh.³⁹² Al-Ghazālī mentions *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Šafā'* in this section. According to him, the special knowledge that some adherents of Ismā'īlism claim to have amounts to inconsequential details of the philosophy of Pythagoras. Indeed, al-Ghazālī continues, the philosophical system of Pythagoras was one of the earliest of the ancients and the weakest of all. Al-Ghazālī identifies the Ikhwān al-Šafā' as

³⁹¹ Nizām al-Mulk, *The Book of Government*, 214.

³⁹² Poonawala, *Biobibliography*, 24–25.

the followers of Pythagoras in the Muslim world, and this, for him, makes their thought a residuum of philosophy.³⁹³

Given the stigma around Ismā'īlism during the era and the conception of *Rasā'il* as part of their propaganda, it is understandable why al-Ghazālī tried to hide his engagement with *Rasā'il*. The reason for his unfavorable remarks about them as expressed in *Deliverer* will be clarified more thoroughly with the presentation of its historical context in the form of the Nishapur controversy.

2.8 The Nishapur Controversy

The information about al-Ghazālī's life can be considered abundant when compared to that available about the other scholars of his time. This is mainly because of the fact that he left a book in which he presented his own account of the circumstances of his life. This book is the famous *Deliverer from Error*.

Deliverer has been accepted by many as the definitive account of al-Ghazālī's life since its publication in al-Ghazālī's final years. It has served as a starting point for many other publications regarding al-Ghazālī's life and thought.³⁹⁴ The book has been the source of the most widely circulated image of al-Ghazālī, a scholar who turned to Sufism at the height of his fame and glory as the result of a spiritual crisis caused by his relentless search for truth.

As noted in the first chapter, this image of al-Ghazālī has been called into question over the past several decades. In 1943, 'Abd al-Dā'im Abū al-'Atā al-Baqarī suggested that the main reason for al-Ghazālī's publication of *Deliverer* was to justify his return to teaching

³⁹³ Al-Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh min al-Dalāl*, in *Majmū'at Rasā'il Imām al-Ghazālī*, v. 7, 55–56; W. Montgomery Watt, *The Faith and Practice of al-Ghazālī*, (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1953), 53.

³⁹⁴ See Montgomery Watt, *Muslim Intellectual* and Margaret Smith, *al-Ghazālī: the Mystic* (Lahore: Hijra International Publishers, 1983).

in Nishapur.³⁹⁵ Because of this, al-Baqarī asserts, the confessions of al-Ghazālī as presented in *Deliverer* do not correspond with the actual facts of his life and intellectual development. According to al-Baqarī, *Deliverer* was a fiction written to reflect the idealized version of al-Ghazālī's life without the intention of providing the historical facts of his intellectual and psychological states. Therefore, for al-Baqarī, *Deliverer* should not be taken as a literal account of al-Ghazālī's life and thought.³⁹⁶

Al-Baqarī's objection to taking *Deliverer* as an autobiography and his attempt to associate the book with its historical context was a considerable step towards a better understanding of *Deliverer*. However, al-Baqarī's contribution can be considered inconclusive, since he seems to have been unaware of another important source for al-Ghazālī's life, namely his letters written mostly in Persian.

In his 1985 article, "Quelques remarques sur le *Munqidh min ad-dalâl*,"³⁹⁷ Josef van Ess claimed that taking *Deliverer* as an autobiography was a mistake made by the earlier readers of the book. According to him, *Deliverer* was "nothing but a great apology,"³⁹⁸ written as a response to a campaign against al-Ghazālī after his return to teaching in Nishapur.³⁹⁹ Van Ess used the letters of al-Ghazālī in order to construct the events of the controversy, and asserted that while composing *Deliverer*, al-Ghazālī borrowed various styles of narration from his predecessors such as al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī's quest for the criterion of

³⁹⁵ 'Abd al-Dā'im Abū al-'Atā al-Baqarī, *'Itirāfāt al-Ghazālī aw Kayfa Arrakhkha al-Ghazālī Nafsah*, (Cairo: Maṭba'at Lajnat al-Ta'līf wa-al-Tarjamah wa-al-Nashr), 10.

³⁹⁶ Al-Baqarī, *'Itirāfāt*, 160–161.

³⁹⁷ Josef van Ess, "Quelques Remarques Sur le *Munqidh Min ad-Dalâl*," in *Ghazālī: La Raison et le Miracle: Table Ronde Unesco 9-10 decembre 1985*, Paris: Editions Maisonneuve et Larose, 1987, 57–68

³⁹⁸ Van Ess, "Quelques Remarques," 63.

³⁹⁹ Garden, *The First Islamic Reviver*, 7–8.

truth, ‘Umar Khayyām’s four schools of thought which promised to lead to certain knowledge, and Nāsir-i Khusraw’s spiritual crisis near the age of forty.⁴⁰⁰

The most conclusive account of the Nishapur controversy to date was produced by Kenneth Garden based on the insight provided by Van Ess with his article. Garden published several articles and a book in which he described the events of the controversy, its cause, and the matters of contention. In addition to the customary sources for al-Ghazālī’s life, Garden extensively used al-Ghazālī’s Persian letters, a source which includes very important biographical elements and had previously been neglected by scholars.

According to Kenneth Garden, during the first part of his life al-Ghazālī would have embraced the Aristotelian notion that the existence of a just ruler who provides a stable political order would result in a wisely managed household formed by individuals who would be willing to conduct their activities in a perfectly ethical manner. This was the time when al-Ghazālī was serving in the court of Nizām al-Mulk as one of the official religious scholars of the Saljūq regime. However, the regime he was serving collapsed within a period of weeks while at the peak of its strength, and the Saljūq realm fell into an unpredictable civil war. After the collapse of this powerful state, Garden asserts, al-Ghazālī replaced his faith in the preeminence of the virtuous political order with the preeminence of the virtuous individual.⁴⁰¹

For Frank Griffel as well, al-Ghazālī’s presentation of his dramatic repentance in *Deliverer* was part of a literary pattern which was widely used in Sufi literature. Griffel also confirms that none of al-Ghazālī’s theological and philosophical positions moved in a

⁴⁰⁰ Van Ess, “Quelque Remarques,” 64–67; Garden, *the First Islamic Reviver*, 7. For Nāsir-i Khusraw see Alice C. Hunsberger, *Nasir Khusraw: The Ruby of Badakhshan: A Portrait of the Persian Poet, Traveller and Philosopher*, (London: I. B. Tauris in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2000), especially 49–71.

⁴⁰¹ Garden, *The First Islamic Reviver*, 57.

different direction after 1095, as had been assumed by earlier scholars. The only change that happened during that time in al-Ghazālī's thinking was that the moral value of individual human actions became more important than the collective actions of political entities.⁴⁰²

According to Garden, motivated by his tremendous confidence in his intellectual capacity, al-Ghazālī took on the responsibility of creating this virtuous individual.⁴⁰³ After this time, his greatest concern was not in fact how to achieve salvation for his soul, but how to instruct others in the pursuit of eternal happiness. His strategy was to convince the public with a unique discourse of decay and to promote an urgent revivalist agenda as the path to recovery. Al-Ghazālī left his prestigious teaching position in Baghdad in the midst of these concerns.

According to Garden, giving up his teaching position was a deliberate action in the service of his new vision. He knew that as long as he kept his pompous position at the Nizāmiyya of Baghdad, he would be incapable of convincing the public that he was the only qualified guide for his age without any faultless conduct. For his new mission, he needed to present himself in a way more acceptable to the broader segments of the population.⁴⁰⁴

In fact, after he left Baghdad al-Ghazālī never became a solitary and otherworldly seeker who dedicated himself completely to spiritual pursuits, as he presented himself in the *Deliverer*. On the contrary, he continued to engage in worldly matters with his new strategy during this time. First of all, he was not alone during his sojourn in Syria, but was accompanied by Abū Ṭāhir Ibrāhīm b. al-Muṭahhar al-Shaybānī. Abu Ṭāhir was a student of al-Juwaynī in Nishapur alongside al-Ghazālī, and followed him first to Baghdad and then to

⁴⁰² Griffel, *al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, 43.

⁴⁰³ He implies in *Deliverer* that he was the renewer of his time sent by God at the beginning of the sixth century of the Hijrī calendar. See *al-Munqidh*, 75–76.

⁴⁰⁴ Garden, *The First Islamic Reviver*, 57.

Syria and Hijaz.⁴⁰⁵ Al-Ghazālī also spent a considerable amount of time on the composition of his *Ihyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn* (*Revival of the Religious Sciences*) which would later become the major vehicle for the propagation of his revivalist agenda.⁴⁰⁶ He continued to engage with the prominent scholars of his time and taught in various cities.⁴⁰⁷ In addition to instructing students, he read excerpts from his *Revival* to the public at mosques during this time.⁴⁰⁸

Al-Ghazālī was absent from Baghdad for only two years, contrary to the ten-year period in traditional accounts. During these two years, he stayed not only in Damascus, but also traveled through Palestine and visited Jerusalem. He wrote his *al-Risālah al-Qudsiyyah* (*Letter for Jerusalem*) when he was still in this city.⁴⁰⁹ He left Jerusalem in 1096 in order to participate in the pilgrimage of that year.⁴¹⁰ He returned to Baghdad for the second time in 1097. His student Abū Bakr b. al-‘Arabi met with him during this second visit and reported that he read parts of his *Revival* to the public in Baghdad as well.⁴¹¹ He stayed in Baghdad less than six months during this time and was back in Tūs, his birthplace, before the end of the same year.⁴¹²

⁴⁰⁵ Abdel Latif Tibawī, “al-Ghazālī’s Sojourn in Damascus and Jerusalem,” *Islamic Quarterly*, 1965, 66–67; Griffel, *al-Ghazālī’s Philosophical Theology*, 42; Kenneth Garden, “Coming Down From the Mountaintop: Al-Ghazālī’s Autobiographical Writings in Context,” *The Muslim World*, October 2011, v. 101, 594.

⁴⁰⁶ Garden, *The First Islamic Reviver*, 9; Tibawī, “al-Ghazālī’s Sojourn,” 73.

⁴⁰⁷ Tibawī, “al-Ghazālī’s Sojourn,” 73.

⁴⁰⁸ Griffel, *al-Ghazālī’s Philosophical Theology*, 44.

⁴⁰⁹ Tibawī, “al-Ghazālī’s Sojourn,” 65–68.

⁴¹⁰ Griffel, *al-Ghazālī’s Philosophical Theology*, 47.

⁴¹¹ Tibawī, “al-Ghazālī’s Sojourn,” 68; Griffel, *al-Ghazālī’s Philosophical Theology*, 48.

⁴¹² Griffel, *al-Ghazālī’s Philosophical Theology*, 49.

Al-Ghazālī states in *Deliverer* that after his return to Tūs, he preferred to live in seclusion and retreat in order to purify his heart with prayer.⁴¹³ This statement, however, should not be taken to mean that he had become a totally isolated person who severed all ties with the world and the public. In fact, al-Ghazālī never gave up teaching after he left Baghdad, and continued his teaching activities after he returned to his hometown. But this time he was teaching mostly at a small madrasa known as a *zāwiya*, a school which was supported by the small endowments or donations instead of being supported by the state. He published books and continued to communicate with the people of high caliber such as Fahr al-Mulk (d. 1106) either face-to-face or via letters.⁴¹⁴

Al-Ghazālī's most powerful correspondent, Fahr al-Mulk, invited him to teach at the Nizamiya of Nishapur in the summer of 1106. Fahr al-Mulk, who was one of the many powerful sons of Nizām al-Mulk, was the vizier of the Saljuq king of the East, Sancar (d. 1157), at the time. With the involvement of Fahr al-Mulk, the young king ordered al-Ghazālī to come to Nishapur to fill of the post.⁴¹⁵ This shows that al-Ghazālī was still in contact with the heirs of his old patron Nizām al-Mulk even after his return to Tūs.

Fahr al-Mulk was assassinated by the Ismā'īlīs of Alamut the same year he appointed al-Ghazālī to the teaching position of the Nizamiya of Nishapur.⁴¹⁶ It seems that after the death of Fahr al-Mulk, al-Ghazālī's circumstances in Nishapur changed dramatically. The death of the vizier made him vulnerable to the attacks which came from the "anti-Ghazālī

⁴¹³ Al-Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh*, 62.

⁴¹⁴ Griffel, *al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, 49–50.

⁴¹⁵ Griffel, *al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, 53–54.

⁴¹⁶ Abdülkerim Özeydin, "Fahrülmülk: Ali b. Nizamülmülk," *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi*, İstanbul, 1995, v. 12, 99–100.

faction in Nishapur.”⁴¹⁷ Not long after the death of Fahr al-Mulk, the controversy around the content of his books erupted.

Al-Ghazālī’s contemporary ‘Abd al-Ghāfir al-Fārisī briefly mentions that al-Ghazālī was facing constant criticisms after he was returned to teaching by the vizier Fahr al-Mulk. For ‘Abd al-Ghāfir, al-Ghazālī was indifferent to these criticisms, and had no intention to spend any effort for their rebuttals. Instead of involving himself in the scholarly debates for the achievement of worldly splendor, as he had done in Baghdad, his aim during this time was to be beneficial to people and guide them truly with his knowledge.⁴¹⁸ Nevertheless, al-Ghazālī was eventually forced to defend himself and his works and to answer his critics before a royal hearing.

It seems that the anti-Ghazālī faction had been looking for several years for the best opportunity to cast al-Ghazālī into disfavor. They found this opportunity when they recruited a certain man named al-Māzarī al-Dhakī to their cause. He was originally from the western part of the Muslim world (*Maghrib*) and was an outsider in Khorasan. This quality made him a perfect tool in the hands of al-Ghazālī’s enemies, who took the precaution of acting through an outsider.⁴¹⁹ According to the anonymous compiler of al-Ghazālī’s letters, the anti-Ghazālī faction managed to antagonize him against al-Ghazālī by claiming that al-Ghazālī’s writings

⁴¹⁷ ‘Abd al-Ghāfir uses the expression that “the lion was away from his den” in his description of this new stage in al-Ghazālī’s life. See Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi’iyyah al-Kubrā*, ed. ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ Muḥammad al-Ḥilū and Maḥmūd Muḥammad al-Ṭanāḥī (Cairo: Maṭba‘at ‘Isā al-Bābī al-Halabī, 1968), v. 6, 207; the expression “anti-Ghazālī faction in Nishapur” belongs to Kenneth Garden, and according to Garden they were a group of Nishapuri religious scholars who took issue with certain aspects of al-Ghazālī’s thought, “al-Māzarī al-Dhakī: al-Ghazālī’s Maghribi Adversary in Nishapur,” *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 21:1, (2010), 91 and 103.

⁴¹⁸ Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, v. 6, 208.

⁴¹⁹ Kenneth Garden, “al-Māzarī al-Dhakī,” 103.

included unfavorable remarks about Mālik b. Anas (d. 179/795) and al-Qādī Abū Bakr al-Baḳillānī (d. 403/1013).⁴²⁰

Al-Māzarī al-Dhakī started his scholarly career with great expectations, but the only distinction he gained throughout his life was for his mastery over his native language, Arabic. Rather than scholarship, he became famous in debating others, humiliating their Arabic and correcting their grammatical mistakes. In a state governed mostly by nonnative speakers of Arabic, his strategy of terrorizing other scholars with his grammatical superiority was relatively successful, and as a result, he was hired by the Saljūq sultan Malik Shāh as the tutor of his sons in Isfahan. It might be the case that one of the king's sons al-Dhakī tutored at the time was Sanjar, who would later be the king of the East during the controversy.⁴²¹

Provoked by the anti-Ghazālī faction, al-Māzarī al-Dhakī approached al-Ghazālī and confronted him. Al-Ghazālī claims in his letters that al-Dhakī brought him copies of several of his works, including *Mishkāṭ al-Anwār*, in order to receive his permission as confirmation of their authenticity. However, after examining their content, al-Ghazālī noticed some interpolations. He refused to sign it and made the matter known to the authorities. Thereupon al-Māzarī al-Dhakī was banished from Nishapur and went directly to the court of Sanjar.⁴²² There he repeated the accusations about al-Ghazālī, and knowing that Sanjar was a Hanafī, he

⁴²⁰ Al-Ghazālī, *Makātib-e Fārsi-ye Ghazālī be-nam Faḍā'il al-Anām min Rasā'il Ḥujjāt al-Islam*, ed. 'Abbās Iqbāl, Tehran: Ketab-furūshi-ya Ibn Sīnā, 1333, 3.

⁴²¹ Kenneth Garden, "al-Māzarī al-Dhakī," 99–100.

⁴²² Al-Ghazālī, *Faḍā'il al-Anām*, 11–12.

brought to Sanjar's attention al-Ghazālī's *al-Mankhūl min Ta'liqāt al-Uṣūl*, the book which included al-Ghazālī's youthful objections to Abū Hanīfa.⁴²³

Upon hearing these accusations, Sanjar immediately summoned al-Ghazālī to his court for a hearing. In a letter he wrote to Sanjar, al-Ghazālī asked to be excused from attending the hearing, saying that he had promised in Jerusalem never to attend to the court of a king, never to take any gift from a king, and never to involve himself in a religious debate.⁴²⁴ Instead of going himself, he sent some of his followers from Tūs to the court for his defense. While it showed that he had supporters in Tūs, this strategy was not effective in diverting the king's anger. At the insistence of the anti-Ghazālī faction, Sanjar gave a firm order to his vizier Mu'in al-Mulk for al-Ghazālī's to attend the court in order to answer the accusations.⁴²⁵

In his defense at the court, al-Ghazālī reminded the king that he had chosen to live in seclusion in his *zāwiya* until Fahr al-Mulk forced him to take the teaching position in Nishapur. He had originally been insistent in his refusal of the position and had told Fahr al-Mulk that the time was not ready for him to teach, stating that at the time telling the truth would accomplish nothing but earning him enemies from every corner. But Fahr al-Mulk convinced him by promising his full support against the accusations of the objectors and also adding that the justice of the king would be on his side. Concerning his criticism of Abū Hanīfa, al-Ghazālī asserted to the king that he never defamed Abū Hanīfa in his books and that the accusations in this respect were not true.⁴²⁶

⁴²³ Al-Ghazālī, *al-Mankhūl min Ta'liqāt al-Uṣūl*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥasan Ḥītū (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1980), 471 and 500.

⁴²⁴ Al-Ghazālī, *Faḍā'il al-Anām*, 4–5.

⁴²⁵ Al-Ghazālī, *Faḍā'il al-Anām*, 5–6.

⁴²⁶ Al-Ghazālī, *Faḍā'il al-Anām*, 10.

From the letters, it is not possible to say what happened exactly during the trial, since the opposing side is not represented in the documents. But it seems clear that after responding to the royal summons, al-Ghazālī gained the favor of the young king and returned to his hometown unharmed. The people of Tūs went out to welcome him and celebrated his safe return with a festival. As a sign of goodwill, the king sent him an animal he had caught in a hunt, and in return for his favor, al-Ghazālī wrote the book *Nasīhat al-Mulūk* for the king and sent it to him.⁴²⁷

The exoneration of al-Ghazālī at the court and Sanjar's subsequent favor for him did not bring an end to the activities of the anti-Ghazālī faction in their attempts to defame him. Ashamed and disgraced in the royal presence, some of them intended to confront al-Ghazālī again and went to Tūs to see him. They found al-Ghazālī in the hospice with his followers. They asked al-Ghazālī whether he had any commitment to a particular school of thought. Al-Ghazālī answered with confidence that in matters of reason (*'aqliyyāt*) he followed the apodeictic proof, and that in matters of religion (*shar'īyyāt*) he followed only the Qur'ān rather than imitating any other scholar like al-Shāfi'ī or Abū Hanīfa. After hearing this response, according to the compiler of the letters, they lost the will to continue the debate. They left Tūs and sent al-Ghazālī a letter asking him to explain some ambiguous points they found in his writings.⁴²⁸

Instead of directly answering the questions the opposing side sent to him, al-Ghazālī insulted the opponents at the beginning of his letter with a long discourse on spiritual diseases. Al-Ghazālī's discourse is informative about how he perceived the source of the controversy. According to al-Ghazālī, their opposition to his teaching revealed nothing other

⁴²⁷ Al-Ghazālī, *Faḍā'il al-Anām*, 11.

⁴²⁸ Al-Ghazālī, *Faḍā'il al-Anām*, 12.

than the sickness of their own hearts. He compares the scholars to physicians and asserts that just like as incomplete scholar (*alim-e nāqish*) should not act as a physician, the complete scholar (*alim-e kāmīl*) should not try to heal every disease, since he must know that some diseases are incurable. Trying to heal every disease is waste of time, and for that reason is unwise. When the wise physician sees a disease of this type, he should inform the patient that the outcome of the treatment will not be positive. Al-Ghazālī thinks that his opponents consist of four groups of people who are sick with four different types of disease, of which only one is responsive to treatment.⁴²⁹

The first group has the sickness of jealousy (*hasad*) as the source of their objection. According to al-Ghazālī, it is a chronic disease without any treatment. He states that it is best to leave them with the sickness since, although almost any form of enmity might be turned into a friendship, nothing can be done about jealousy. They harm themselves more than they harm al-Ghazālī, because just like fire consumes wood, jealousy consumes the jealous. Other than offering his pity, al-Ghazālī relates, he can do nothing for them.⁴³⁰

The second group has the sickness of foolishness (*ḥamāqah*) as the source of their objection. This is also a chronic disease with no treatment. According to al-Ghazālī, Jesus was able to resurrect the dead, but was unable to teach anything to the foolish. Al-Ghazālī accepts that his opponents have some knowledge about the sciences, but states that they definitely cannot reach his level of understanding. He tells them not to question him. Reminding them of the story of Moses and Khidr from the Qur’ān, he states that there is wisdom in his writings beyond the level of their understanding.⁴³¹

⁴²⁹ Al-Ghazālī, *Faḍā’il al-Anām*, 13.

⁴³⁰ Al-Ghazālī, *Faḍā’il al-Anām*, 13.

⁴³¹ Al-Ghazālī, *Faḍā’il al-Anām*, 13–14.

The third group consists of people who want to be guided, but who have been inflicted by the sickness of weak-mindedness. The source of their questioning is their desire to be guided, but their weakminds become an obstacle to his message. Their sickness cannot be treated, since it is part of their natural dispositions. One must speak to them according to the level of their capacity. They should also know their level and should not object to things which go beyond that level.⁴³²

Similar to the third group, the forth group consists of people who want to be guided as well. However, compared to the others they are smart and capable of understanding what al-Ghazālī would say to them. Their minds are not overcome by worldly desires and by their carnal powers such as anger and lust. The sickness they have is the absence of knowledge and, for al-Ghazālī, this is curable. Al-Ghazālī states that he wrote the letter for this group, and for the rare and exceptional among them. If somebody reads the letter and finds it unsatisfactory for his disease, he must know that he belongs to one of the groups with incurable diseases.⁴³³

Like he does in *Deliverer*, in this letter too al-Ghazālī denies the allegations against him, partly by ignoring them and partly by putting the blame on his opponents. Without knowing any other source, the reader of the letter would think that an ignorant group of people with evil intentions was attacking a scholar with extraordinary credentials for no particular reason other than jealousy. However, the compiler of the letters gives some clues about the matters of dispute, which al-Ghazālī tries to mention as little as possible. According to the compiler, the anti-Ghazālī faction claimed that al-Ghazālī

“did not have any belief whatsoever in Islam, but rather that he held the creed of the philosophers and heretics (*falāsifa va mulhidān*) and he mixed all of his books with

⁴³² Al-Ghazālī, *Faḍā'il al-Anām*, 14.

⁴³³ Al-Ghazālī, *Faḍā'il al-Anām*, 14–15.

their words. He mixed unbelief (*kufr*) and nonsense (*abāṭil*) with the secrets of the revelation. He called God the true light and this is the belief of the Zoroastrians (*madhhab-i majūs*), who speak of light and darkness.”⁴³⁴

The explanation of the compiler corresponds with the questions the opponents asked al-Ghazālī. The opponents wanted him to explain what he meant by saying that God was true light and that the human soul was alien to this world and wanted to return to its true realm in the sublime world (*‘alam-e ‘ulwī*). Their opposition to these points was that they were the teachings of the philosophers. It is clear from these objections that unlike al-Ghazālī’s presentation of them as plotting against him out of jealousy, the opponents were capable of understanding al-Ghazālī’s writings and smart enough to identify their sources.

According to the opponents, one of the sources al-Ghazālī depended on was *Rasā’il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’*. The main protagonist in the controversy, al-Māzarī, claimed that one of al-Ghazālī’s followers informed him that al-Ghazālī constantly read *Rasā’il* and was addicted to it.⁴³⁵ Given the animosity al-Māzarī displayed towards al-Ghazālī, this information might be viewed as unreliable. But al-Ghazālī’s literary attempts to reject the claim led one to believe that he took it seriously and spent considerable effort in refuting it. The most important outcome of his attempt was his famous *Deliverer*.

2.9 *Deliverer from Error* as an Indirect Response to the Allegations of the Controversy

⁴³⁴ Al-Ghazālī, *Faḍā’il al-Anām*, 3. The translation is provided by Kenneth Garden; see his “al-Māzarī al-Dhakī,” 93.

⁴³⁵ al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi’iyyah*, v. 6, 241. Al-Māzarī says ‘*arrafanī ba’ḍ aṣḥābih annahū kāna lahū ‘ukūf ‘alā Rasā’il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’*’.

In the form of a question come from an unknown inquirer, al-Ghazālī lays out his objectives at the beginning of *Deliverer*. The answer his interlocutor expects of him is to address several points. He wants al-Ghazālī to show first “the aims and the inmost nature of the sciences and the perplexing depths of the religious systems;” second, the difficulties he encountered in his “attempt to extricate the truth from the confusion of contending sects and to distinguish the different ways and methods, and the venture he made in climbing from the plain of naïve and second-hand belief to the peak of direct vision;” and third, “what profit he derived from the science of theology, what he disapproved of in the methods of authoritative instruction, what he rejected of the methods of philosophy, and what he approved in the Sufi way of life.”⁴³⁶ In addition to these points, al-Ghazālī tells his inquirer that he will explain why he gave up teaching in Baghdad and why he returned to it again in Nishapur after a long interval.⁴³⁷

Even at the outset of the book, al-Ghazālī’s rhetoric implies that he was concerned with highlighting his intellectual superiority over others. The form of the inquiry posed to him contains an explicit praise of al-Ghazālī as someone who had climbed to the summit of knowledge. Not long after this praise, al-Ghazālī confirms it by implying that he belongs to a minority who can dive into the ocean of knowledge without drowning, which has been the fate of many others.⁴³⁸ It is possible to assume from this polemical remark that al-Ghazālī was in the position of defending himself when he was writing the book. One of the points he was forced to defend was his relation to the ethics of the philosophers, a point of contention which occupies a considerable number of pages in the book.

⁴³⁶ Al-Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh*, 23; Watt, *Faith and Practice*, 19.

⁴³⁷ Al-Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh*, 23; Watt, *Faith and Practice*, 19.

⁴³⁸ Al-Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh*, 24; Watt, *Faith and Practice*, 20.

Al-Ghazālī informs his reader that the ethics of the philosophers comprise the discussion of the characteristics and moral constitution of the soul, its various types, and the method of moderating and controlling them. According to him, the philosophers borrowed these teachings from the mystics (*al-Ṣūfiyyah*), who in their spiritual journey learnt about the virtues and vices of the soul and the defects in its action.⁴³⁹ After taking over these teachings, the philosophers mixed them with their own discourse in order to make it more presentable to the public. With the passing of time, two dangers arose from this practice of the philosophers regarding the reception of these truths.⁴⁴⁰

The first danger appears in the form of a total opposition. The people with weak minds assert that since these ethical doctrines are present in the books of the philosophers and mixed with their corrupt teachings, all reference to them and their upholders must be labeled illegitimate and prohibited. For them, since they heard these doctrines from the philosophers—who, according to them, are liars—what the philosophers say must automatically be lies. These people, according to al-Ghazālī, resemble a person who hears a Christian saying that “There is no God but God, and Jesus is the Messenger of God” and denies it as a lie on the grounds that it is said by a Christian. But, al-Ghazālī continues, the statement is true, and the Christian is an unbeliever not because of this statement but in respect to his denial of Muhammad.⁴⁴¹

According to al-Ghazālī, this is the sign of having a lower intellect. People with lower intellect take the man as the criterion of the truth and not the truth as the criterion of the man. These people, he says, should not be allowed to read the books of the philosophers. On the

⁴³⁹ Here, it must be noted that one of the questions his opponents asked him in the letter was related to his doctrine of soul, which reminded them of the ethics of the philosophers.

⁴⁴⁰ Al-Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh*, 44; Watt, *Faith and Practice*, 38–39.

⁴⁴¹ Al-Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh*, 44; Watt, *Faith and Practice*, 39.

other hand, the intelligent man knows the truth and examines the particular assertion without taking the speaker into consideration. He is like an experienced money-changer who can distinguish the gold among the fake coins. Likening him to a strong swimmer, al-Ghazālī says that he, unlike the beginner, should not be prevented from delving into the ocean. And again, unlike the ignorant boy, he is the accomplished snake charmer who has the license to touch the snake.⁴⁴²

Al-Ghazālī states that the people whose understanding has not fully grasped the sciences and whose insights have not penetrated the fundamentals of religion have raised a similar objection to the statements he made in his several works. They claimed that these statements were adopted from the works of the ancient philosophers. Al-Ghazālī vehemently denied this accusation, claiming that some of them occurred to him independently while others came from the books of religion and from the works of the mystics.⁴⁴³

Al-Ghazālī is hypothetically willing to accept their claim that the source of these statements is the works of the ancient philosophers. But even if that were the case, he says, it still would not justify their instant denial. If the statements are reasonable in themselves, supported by proof, and do not contradict the principles of religion, then it is not obligatory to avoid them. Denying their content completely would mean to deny every truth first comprehended by the philosophers. It would also mean to deny many verses from the Qur'an, the traditions of the prophet, and the accounts of the early Muslims. This is because of the fact that Ikhwān al-Safā had cited them in their *Rasā'il*. With the help of them, Ikhwān had gradually enticed men of weak understanding to accept their falsehood, and abandoning the

⁴⁴² Al-Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh*, 45; Watt, *Faith and Practice*, 39–40.

⁴⁴³ Al-Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh*, 45; Watt, *Faith and Practice*, 41. This part of *Deliverer* seems very similar to the letter where al-Ghazālī talks about the intellectual capacity of his opponents.

true content in their works would mean to give up in the struggle of retrieving the truth from the heretics.⁴⁴⁴

According to al-Ghazālī, the works of the philosophers resemble a surgeon's cupping-glass. Ignorant people would believe the honey inside the cupping-glass to be impure merely because it is inside the cupping-glass. They would not be aware of the fact that the impurity does not come from the cupping-glass but is due to a property of the substance in it which, most of the time, is the impure blood. Similar to this example, they would reject the true statements of the people they disapprove of without investigating their actual statements. This attitude, al-Ghazālī asserts, is extremely erroneous, and is the reason why people reject the ethics of the philosophers without valid justification.⁴⁴⁵

The second danger appears in the form of acceptance. When the people of weak minds look into books like *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*, they view them a mixture of the principles of religion, the sayings of the prophets, and the utterances of the mystics. They approve of these portions and form a good opinion about its authors. Their good opinion results in the acceptance of the falsehoods that are mixed with these truths, and gradually they slip into falsehood.⁴⁴⁶

The solution al-Ghazālī offers for the avoidance of this danger is that people should abstain from reading their books. Only the experienced scholar should have the permission to read them. But even these scholars must read them responsibly by taking into consideration the well-being of the public. Just as the skilled snake-charmer must not play with the snake in front of his child lest the child seek to imitate him, the experienced scholar as well should be

⁴⁴⁴ Al-Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh*, 46; Watt, *Faith and Practice*, 41.

⁴⁴⁵ Al-Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh*, 46–47; Watt, *Faith and Practice*, 41–42.

⁴⁴⁶ Al-Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh*, 47; Watt, *Faith and Practice*, 42.

cautious in his relation to these books before the eyes of the public. However, like the snake-charmer's extraction of antidote from the venomous snake, he must read these books in order to extract the antidote for the intention of destroying the poison. He must not withhold the antidote from the person who needs it when circumstances require its use. This person may loathe the antidote if he learns that it comes from the snake. But as his duty, the scholar must show him the value of the antidote despite its abominable source.⁴⁴⁷

Another example al-Ghazālī uses to support his point is that of a poor man urgently in need of money who refuses to take the gold coin from the bag of a counterfeiter. What he does in this case is pure ignorance, and because of it, he misses the chance to solve his problem. He must be told that the proximity between the gold coin and the fake coin does not make the gold fake or the fake, gold.⁴⁴⁸

According to Alexander Treiger, al-Ghazālī's presentation of the dispute regarding his use of philosophical material is a veiled acknowledgement of his dependence on the books of the philosophers.⁴⁴⁹ Treiger emphasizes that al-Ghazālī employs several strategies in order to defend himself and his books. Firstly, he explicitly denies using philosophical doctrines in composing his own works. Secondly, he argues that the content of the philosophers' books should not be immediately regarded as false without critical examination. If some parts of their content are deemed to be true by an expert scholar like himself, then their usage is legitimate and even beneficial to the Muslim community. Thirdly, he asserts that the philosophers had taken these ideas from the books of revelation and from the books of the mystics who, according to al-Ghazālī, had always existed throughout human history. So in

⁴⁴⁷ Al-Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh*, 47; Watt, *Faith and Practice*, 42–43.

⁴⁴⁸ Al-Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh*, 47; Watt, *Faith and Practice*, 43.

⁴⁴⁹ Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge*, 98.

this case, for al-Ghazālī, his use of philosophical materials is nothing but returning them to the original owners.⁴⁵⁰

Treiger's analysis of al-Ghazālī's strategy in the face of the controversy hits the target. But, since Treiger's argument is to prove Ibn Sīnā's influence over al-Ghazālī, he seems to miss the larger point. Treiger does not emphasize the fact that while elaborating the two dangers pertaining to the different attitudes towards philosophy, al-Ghazālī uses only one name from the several schools of philosophy as his most vivid example. The name he chooses is that of the Ikhwān al-Safā', and he designates the rest of the philosophical schools as "the others," thus making them seem somewhat trivial. In the passages concerning two cases of danger, they and their works, *Rasā'il*, are always at the center of the discussion. Al-Ghazālī explicitly mentions that *Rasā'il* are full of truth taken from legitimate sources and mixed with false beliefs by their authors. For his audience, he seems to be concretizing *Rasā'il*'s case with the examples of the cupping-glass, the snake, and the dangerous waters of the ocean. However, the concretization also serves for him as a palliative to lessen the gravity of the matters. While trying to convince his audience to accept the outcome of his examples, he finds the opportunity to avoid talking directly about *Rasā'il*. In the process, *Rasā'il* slowly disappears in the stream of his striking examples.

⁴⁵⁰ Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge*, 101. In defending himself by claiming to be the original owner of these teachings, al-Ghazālī is very similar to his other opponents, that is to say, the Ismā'īlīs of Egypt. The head teacher of their propagandists, Al-Mu'ayyad fi'l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī (d. 470/1078), says that "The conviction of the people of truth is that all the sciences, including the rational ones which the philosophers claim (as their own), are collectively present in the sciences of the prophets—may (God's) peace be upon them—and have diverged and branched out from there." See his *al-Majālis al-Mu'ayyadiyyah: al-Mi'ah al-Ūlā*, ed. Mustafa Ghālib (Beirut: Dār al-Andalus, n.d.), 5; *An Anthology of Ismaili Literature: A Shi'i Vision of Islam*, ed. Herman Landolt, Samira Sheikh, and Kutub Kassam (London and New York: I. B. Tauris Publishers in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2008), 133.

The relevant section of *Deliverer* is very similar in tone and rhetoric to the letter al-Ghazālī sent as a response to the questions of his opponents in the days following his exoneration before the royal court.⁴⁵¹ Al-Ghazālī is more specific about their objections in the letter and states that the opponents had claimed that his teaching regarding soul's alienness in this world and its desire to return to the sublime world was taken from the works of the philosophers and thus illegitimate. In response to this claim, he gives the example he uses in *Deliverer*, which is the example of a person who believes that a Christian is a liar when he says that Jesus is the prophet of God on the basis of his being a Christian. Like he does in *Deliverer*, he also reminds his opponents the statement of 'Alī b. Abī Tālib regarding the criterion of truth and the truthful men. According to 'Alī, al-Ghazālī reports, one must not know the truth by the man, but must know the truth first and then he will accordingly know who is truthful.⁴⁵²

Based on these similarities, it is possible to say that the gist of the relevant discussion of *Deliverer* already exists in the letter which was produced during the Nishapur controversy. In *Deliverer*, however, al-Ghazālī strategically isolates the discussion from its particular context, elaborates it with more vivid examples, and presents it within a more general context. The strategy he employs helps him to shape the perception of his later readers, but it does not change the fact that defending himself against these accusations was one of his intentions in crafting the arguments he put forward in *Deliverer*.

2.10 Conclusion

While never admitting explicitly incorporating elements from it into his own works, in *Deliverer* al-Ghazālī acknowledges the fact that he studied philosophy at certain points in his

⁴⁵¹ Al-Ghazālī, *Faḍā'il al-Anām*, 12–23.

⁴⁵² Al-Ghazālī, *Faḍā'il al-Anām*, 22.

life. However, he does not give exact information about the scope of his studies or the identity of the philosophers he read. In *Incoherence*, he mentions the names of Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā as the most competent transmitters of philosophy in the Muslim world, and adds that, because of this, he will confine himself to refuting only these two in the book. He mentions their names again in *Deliverer* with similar remarks. His logical works suggest that the main influence on him in this subject was al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā, and in *Deliverer*, he seems to be willing to accept this influence regarding logic. He openly declares his opposition to these philosophers in matters of metaphysics, which he formulates in the twenty discussions of *Incoherence*.

Nothing he says, however, implies that his engagement with philosophy was limited to these two philosophers. His detailed account of philosophy in *Deliverer* reveals that his knowledge about the subject was vast, and that he also read the work of many others besides al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā. In fact, his remarks in *Deliverer* indicate that he read the works of Ikhwān al-Safā, even though he always displays some elements of contempt while talking about them. Nevertheless, it must be kept in mind that the remarks were made in a book which was written in the immediate circumstances of the Nishapur controversy.

When read comparatively, al-Ghazālī's letters and *Deliverer* provide further details about the central issues of the dispute between al-Ghazālī and his opponents which had taken place during the controversy. From one of the letters, we learn that one of the points on which his opponents had accused him was his adaptation of the philosophical teaching regarding soul's alienness in this world and its desire to return to the sublime world. Even though this teaching is one of the central tenets of *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Safā*, their name was never mentioned in this particular letter or in any of the other letters. However, in a discussion of ethics in *Deliverer*, al-Ghazālī repeats the same argument and gives the same example he used in the letter, but this time with the mention of the *Rasā'il* and their authors and with the

omission of much detail about his opponents. Given that the spearhead of the opposition, al-Māzarī al-Dhakī, specifically accused him of being addicted to reading *Rasā'il* during the controversy, it is understandable why al-Ghazālī did not mention their name in the letter while covertly admitting reading them later in *Deliverer*, by which point the heat of the controversy would have cooled down to a tolerable level.

The controversy also reveals that there was some kind of opposition to philosophy in the Muslim world during the era. Considering his fame as the opponent of philosophy, al-Ghazālī's opponents ironically moved to cast him into disfavor in the eyes of the king and the public by trying to prove his positive engagement with philosophy. What is more, he was being accused by them of borrowing from a group of philosophers who were considered to be allied to the heretical sect of Ismā'īlism, a sect which the theologians and the powerful politicians of the era viewed as the mortal enemy of the Sunnī world. This accusation made the case more detrimental for al-Ghazālī.

It is possible to say that in order to lessen the danger, al-Ghazālī gave precedence to mentioning the names of the so-called Sunnī philosophers, like al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā, over Ikhwān al-Safā in the relevant sections of his works. As done earlier by Ibn Sīnā in his autobiography, al-Ghazālī too attempted to distance himself from them as much as possible. But when the connection to *Rasā'il* was discovered by his opponents, he tried to justify it by claiming that the origin of true doctrines found in the works of Ikhwān al-Safā was in fact the books of religion and the mystics. For his part, in fact, this justification was a veiled acknowledgement of his having incorporated certain of their ideas into his own works.

CHAPTER III

AL-GHAZĀLĪ'S SCIENCE OF THE HEREAFTER AND ITS IKHWĀNĪAN FOUNDATIONS

3.1 Introduction

Kenneth Garden argues in his book *The First Islamic Reviver* that al-Ghazālī was the first scholar in the Islamic tradition to proclaim himself the reviver of religion by implying he was the divinely appointed renewer of his century. As a strategy, al-Ghazālī had declared the death of the religious sciences of his time with the intention of subjugating them to the Science of the Hereafter (*'ilm al-ākhirah* or *'ilm ṭarīq al-ākhirah*), a science of his own invention. His aim with the composition of *The Revival of the Religious Sciences* was to provide practical guidance to his fellow Muslims in accordance with the requirements of this new science.⁴⁵³

According to Garden, the sudden collapse of the Saljuq regime, which al-Ghazālī had served many years under the patronage of Nizām al-Mulk, changed al-Ghazālī's ideas about the importance of politics. After the collapse of the political regime, al-Ghazālī started gradually to suggest some modifications in the internal structure of the philosophy's Practical Science. Instead of following the traditional order in the practical science by putting politics first, economics second, and ethics third, he put ethics in the front line to emphasize the

⁴⁵³ Kenneth Garden, *The First Islamic Reviver: Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī and His Revival of the Religious Sciences* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 169; See also, Alexander Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge in Islamic Thought: Al-Ghazālī's Theory of Mystical Cognition and Its Avicennian Foundation* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 35–37.

individual nature of seeking felicity in this life and the hereafter. Al-Ghazālī began to make some modifications in the practical science with the composition of *The Scale of Action*, a work written before his departure from Baghdad in 1095, and developed them in detail further with the composition of *Revival*.⁴⁵⁴

For Garden, al-Ghazālī intended through his new approach to the practical science, further elaborated in *Revival*, to revive the members of his community and lead them to felicity by providing a detailed prescription for the healing of the soul. This characteristic makes *Revival* a comprehensive handbook of how to conduct one's life in the attempt to heal one's soul. In this manner, Garden asserts, the aim of *Revival* is identical with the ultimate philosophical telos, which is the attainment of happiness.⁴⁵⁵

⁴⁵⁴ Garden, *First Islamic Reviver*, 53. Al-Ghazālī clearly states this point at the end of his *Faḍā'il al-Bāṭiniyyah wa Faḍā'il al-Mustazhiriyyah* (*The Infamies of the Batiniyya and the Virtues of the Mustazhiriyya*). He says, "Being the caliph over the creation of God means improving the condition of His creation. He who cannot improve the condition of the people of his city cannot improve the condition of the people of the world, he who cannot improve the condition of the members of his household cannot improve the condition of the people of his city, he who cannot improve his own condition cannot improve the condition of the members of his household, he who cannot improve his own condition must start with the improvement of his heart and the management of his soul. He who desires to change others without changing himself is the conceited one." See al-Ghazālī, *Faḍā'il al-Bāṭiniyyah wa Faḍā'il al-Mustazhiriyyah*, ed. 'Abd al-Raḥmān Badawī (Kuwait: Mu'assasat Dār al-Kutub al-Thaqāfiyyah 1964), 198–199. George Hourani considers this work as chronologically prior to *Scale*. On this, see Hourani's "The Chronology of Ghazali's Writings," in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, v. 79, no. 4, (Oct-Dec., 1959), 227–228; "A Revised Chronology of Ghazali's Writings," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, v. 107, no. 2, (Apr.-Jun., 1984), 293; see also Alexander Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge in Islamic Thought: Al-Ghazālī's Theory of Mystical Cognition and Its Avicennian Foundation* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 11–12.

⁴⁵⁵ Garden, *First Islamic Reviver*, 67.

Based on this feature of *Revival*, Garden claims that one of the major inspirations for the composition of *Revival* was Ibn Sīnā's *Book of Cure* (*Kitāb al-Shifā'*). Ibn Sīnā too wrote his book as a comprehensive program for healing the soul and leading it to felicity. In this respect, both works share the same intention. But the strategy and content followed throughout these works differ from each other. Garden gives the following reasons in order to account for these differences. Al-Ghazālī was not a philosopher in every sense of the word, but was a critical and innovative adopter of philosophy. He acknowledged the possibility of acquiring knowledge, which is the nourishment of the soul on its path toward felicity, not only through syllogistic demonstration (*burhān*) exclusively as held by Ibn Sīnā but also through Sufi inspiration (*ilhām*). By accepting inspiration as a legitimate means to acquire knowledge, he created more room for Sufism in *Revival*. He fused the ethical tradition of philosophy with the revealed law much more heavily than did the philosophy of Ibn Sīnā. He ruled out the traditional procedures of the philosophical curriculum, and ignored the discussions of physics and mathematics almost completely. And unlike Ibn Sīnā's elitist approach, al-Ghazālī desired to make his work more accessible to the broader audience of religious scholars.⁴⁵⁶

Garden's emphasis on Ibn Sīnā's influence over al-Ghazālī is understandable given Ibn Sīnā's undeniable effects on the later development of Islamic thought in all its aspects.⁴⁵⁷ However, much of what Garden views as original to al-Ghazālī in *Revival*—namely giving a

⁴⁵⁶ Garden, *First Islamic Reviver*, 67–68.

⁴⁵⁷ The revisionist literature reviewed in the first chapter might be taken as an indication of Ibn Sīnā's centrality for later Islamic thought. But again, see for example Robert Wisnovsky, "Avicenna and the Avicennian Tradition," in *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy*, ed. Peter Adamson and Richard C. Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 92–136; Wisnovsky, "One Aspect of the Avicennian Turn in Sunnī Theology," in *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*, v. 14 (2004), 65–100; *Avicenna and His Legacy: A Golden Age of Science and Philosophy*, ed. Y. Tzvi Langermann (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009).

prominent position to inspiration (*ilhām*) in the acquisition of knowledge, the fusion of the ethics of philosophy with the revealed law, and the desire to reach a broader audience—seem already present in *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*.

The objective of this chapter, then, is to point out the similarities between al-Ghazālī's new science, the Science of the Hereafter (*'ilm al-ākhirah*),⁴⁵⁸ and the general project of Ikhwān al-Safā as laid out in their *Rasā'il*. In order to do this, it will be appropriate to start with a discussion of the circumstances which led al-Ghazālī to embrace this new strategy. It will also be argued that al-Ghazālī was exposed to *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* no later than the period of his departure from Baghdad in 1095. Following this discussion, the chapter will move on to an examination of the structure, content, and purpose of al-Ghazālī's new science, the Science of the Hereafter (*'ilm al-ākhirah*), in comparison with *Rasā'il*.

3.2 Politics of Baghdad During al-Ghazālī's Stay There

A fair amount of information exists about al-Ghazālī's life from his childhood to his entry into the Nizāmiya madrasa of Nisḥapur. He spent several years in Nisḥapur until the death of his teacher, al-Juwaynī, in 478/1085. After the death of al-Juwaynī, however, al-Ghazālī disappears from the historical sources. It is known that he left Nisḥapur in 1085 and joined the entourage of the powerful vizier of the Saljuqs, Nizām al-Mulk. Beyond that, almost nothing is known about his activities during this period other than that he spent most of these years in the city of Isfahan, where he had stayed until 484/1091.⁴⁵⁹

Al-Ghazālī reappeared again in 484/1091. In that year, he moved to Baghdad after being appointed professor to the Nizāmiya madrasa of the city by order of Nizām al-Mulk. It

⁴⁵⁸ Al-Ghazālī uses two names for his new science, the Science of the Hereafter (*'ilm al-ākhirah*) and the science of the path to the hereafter (*'ilm ṭarīq al-ākhirah*).

⁴⁵⁹ Frank Griffel, *Al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 32.

has been argued that Nizām al-Mulk’s intention in appointing al-Ghazālī was to employ the latter’s knowledge and prestige as a religious scholar in his attempt to ease religious tensions in the Saljuq Empire. By all accounts, al-Ghazālī performed this task successfully during the early years of his stay in Baghdad. There are reports that he was praised by the adherents of different theological schools and that some of their prominent members attended his public lectures.⁴⁶⁰ Nizām al-Mulk also considered al-Ghazālī a suitable emissary between the Saljuq court and the ‘Abbasid caliph in his efforts to maintain a cordial relationship between these political entities. Nizām al-Mulk had such high expectations for al-Ghazālī that he dismissed two professors at the Nizāmiya in order to make a position available for him.⁴⁶¹

The ruling elite and the circles close to them were highly optimistic about the future of the empire at the time al-Ghazālī was appointed to this position.⁴⁶² The empire stretched from central Asia to the Mediterranean, and it had consolidated its authority in the fertile lands of Mesopotamia and Anatolia. Sultan Malik Shah had decided to make Baghdad his winter residence and started to build a grand palace and a royal mosque for his family and his entourage. To keep up with the sultan, the most powerful viziers of the state, such as Nizām al-Mulk and Taj al-Mulk, were also building palaces for themselves in several districts of the

⁴⁶⁰ Griffel, *Al-Ghazālī’s Philosophical Theology*, 34.

⁴⁶¹ Garden, *First Islamic Reviver*, 20–22. It seems that al-Ghazālī thus started making enemies in Baghdad before he even arrived in the city. The scholars who were dismissed to make room for him were Abū ‘Abd Allah al-Tabarī (d. 495/1102) and Abū Muhammad al-Fāmī al-Shīrāzī (d. 500/1107); see Griffel, *Al-Ghazālī’s Philosophical Theology*, 34, and 297.

⁴⁶² In the opening chapter of *The Book of Government* Nizām al-Mulk expresses these optimistic sentiments. He says “Now in the days of some of the caliphs, if ever their empire became extended it was never free from unrest and the insurrections of rebels; but in this blessed age (praise and thanks be to Allah) there is nobody in all the world who in his heart meditates opposition to our lord and master, or ventures his head outside the collar of obedience to him...,” trans. Hubert Darke (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), 11.

city.⁴⁶³ Malik Shah was so confident in his empire that he declared his intention to unite all the Muslim lands from Spain to China under Saljuq rule. To this end, he started to make plans to march to North Africa and assigned several of his generals to seek opportunities for the invasion.⁴⁶⁴

As one of the prominent officials of the Saljuqs, al-Ghazālī was certainly among the optimists. Nizām al-Mulk had already bestowed two honorary titles upon him with his appointment: *Zayn al-Dīn* (Ornament of Religion) and *Sharaf al-A’immah* (Glory of the Religious Leaders). He received another one later, this time possibly from the caliph, *Hujjat al-Islām* (The Proof of Islam). He entered Baghdad with such expensive clothes and a mount of such quality that the inhabitants of the city estimated them to be worth a fortune. He lectured to crowds of several hundred students at the Nizāmiya, and the leading scholars of Baghdad attended his lectures to learn from him. He was also highly respected by the ‘Abbasid caliph in Baghdad, and became one of the religious scholars who attended the court of the caliph regularly.⁴⁶⁵

In addition, al-Ghazālī was academically prolific during these years. He published several important books during the four years he resided in Baghdad, including *Incoherence of the Philosophers* (*Tahāfut al-Falāsifah*) and *The Infamies of the Bāṭiniyya and the Virtues of the Mustazhiriyya* (*Faḍā’ih al-Bāṭiniyyah wa Faḍā’il al-Mustazhiriyyah*).⁴⁶⁶ Al-Ghazālī was

⁴⁶³ Garden, *First Islamic Reviver*, 22.

⁴⁶⁴ Osman Turan, *Selçuklular Tarihi ve Türk-İslam Medeniyeti* (Istanbul: Turan Neşriyat Yurdu, 1969), 167–169; Abdülkerim Özaydın, “Melikşah,” *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi*, Ankara: 2004, v. 29, 56.

⁴⁶⁵ Griffel, *Al-Ghazālī’s Philosophical Theology*, 34–35.

⁴⁶⁶ Hourani, “Revised Chronology,” 292–293; Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge*, 11.

commissioned to write the latter work by the caliph al-Mustazhir,⁴⁶⁷ a fact which illustrates the extent of his involvement with the politics and the prominent political players of the time.

Naturally, not everything was perfect during the period, and there were certain indications of discomfort. Though the Saljuqs controlled vast territories through their network of countless officials, underground Ismā'īlī propaganda continued unabated. The proselytizers were gaining considerable support among the eastern population, especially in the northwestern part of modern-day Iran. Hasan Sabbāh crowned these gains with the establishment of the Nizārī state in the Daylam region in 483/1090. The Nizārī state continued to exist in the middle of Saljuq territory until the coming of the Mongols.⁴⁶⁸

Beside the dangerous presence of the Ismā'īlīs in Egypt and Syria and Hasan Sabbah in Iran, the harmony among the ruling parties of the state was also disappearing. There were disagreements on policy between Sultan Malikshāh and the grand vizier, Nizām al-Mulk, over military spending and the structure of the army. Also, the sultan was becoming extremely uncomfortable about the unchecked power of Nizām al-Mulk and his family. The tension between them erupted in 1092 in an exchange of threatening correspondence. From that time on, the Sultan began to look for an opportunity to dismiss the vizier.⁴⁶⁹

Terken Hatun, the highly ambitious wife of the sultan, was also seeking opportunities to increase her share in the politics of the state.⁴⁷⁰ For the Saljuq state, she was conspiring to

⁴⁶⁷ Farouk Mitha, *Al-Ghazālī and the Ismailis: A Debate on Reason and Authority in Medieval Islam* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris Publishers in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2001), 3.

⁴⁶⁸ Abdülkerim Özaydın, "Hasan Sabbāh," *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi*, İstanbul, 1997, v. 16, 347; İbrahim Kafesoğlu, *Sultan Melikşah* (İstanbul: Milli Eğitim Basımevi, 1973), 122–127.

⁴⁶⁹ Turan, *Selçuklular Tarihi*, 169–173.

⁴⁷⁰ Gülay Ögün Bezer, "Terken Hatun," *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi*, İstanbul, 2011 v. 40, 510.

remove the crown prince Barkyārūq in favor of her own son Mahmud, who was just a toddler at the time. For the ‘Abbasid caliphate, she was trying to convince the caliph to designate her grandson Ja‘far as the heir to the throne. Ja‘far was born to the caliph from Mah Malak, the daughter of Terken Hatun and Malikshāh. She and the vizier Tāj al-Mulk considered Nizām al-Mulk as the main obstacle to their aspirations, and formed an alliance to conspire against him.⁴⁷¹

The gravity of these problems became apparent in 485/1092. During the last months of this year, the sultan and his entourage, including Nizām al-Mulk and the Nizāmiya,⁴⁷² were on their way to Baghdad from Isfahan. Before arriving in Baghdad, Nizām al-Mulk was killed by a young man of Daylamite origin who was dressed as a Sufi and thought to be a Nizārī. After his death, Malikshāh, with the involvement of Terken Hatun as well, appointed Tāj al-Mulk as the grand vizier.⁴⁷³

Tāj al-Mulk started eagerly to remove the supporters of Nizām al-Mulk from the state offices. Within a month after the death of Nizām al-Mulk, Malikshāh died while on a hunting trip, probably from poisoning. Terken Hatun hid the news of his death until she had secured the approval of the caliph for the appointment of her son, Mahmud. This meant the usurpation of Barkyārūq’s right to the throne. In response, Barkyārūq and his supporters, including the powerful Nizāmiya, took up arms in Isfahan to defend his right. At the beginning of 1093, Nizām al-Mulk’s men savagely killed Tāj al-Mulk, under the assumption that he was one of the players in the assassination of Nizām al-Mulk. In June of the same year, Ja‘far, the son of

⁴⁷¹ Turan, *Selçuklular Tarihi*, pp. 170-171; Abdülkerim Özaydın, “Nizamülmülk,” *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi*, Istanbul, 2007, v. 33, 194–195.

⁴⁷² The entourage and the personal army of Nizām al-Mulk were known as the Nizāmiya. Their number was around twenty thousand. See Turan, *Selçuklular Tarihi*, 171.

⁴⁷³ Abdülkerim Özaydın, “Tâcülmülk,” *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi*, Istanbul, 2010, v. 39, 350–360.

the marriage between the ‘Abbasid caliph and Mah Malak Hatun, suddenly died, arousing a sense of disappointment in the hearts of those who had wished to create a perennial union between the caliphate and the Saljuq state.

The struggle between Terken Hatun and Barkyārūq continued for almost two years. Both Terken Hatun and her son Mahmud died at the end of 1093, but the civil war did not come to an end with their deaths. Barkyārūq continued to fight with his relatives for several years to gain supremacy over other members of the Saljuq family.⁴⁷⁴ During this time, the caliph recognized his uncle Tutush as the supreme sultan of the Saljuq family. Barkyārūq defeated Tutush as well, and entered Baghdad in February 1094.⁴⁷⁵ He forced the caliph to declare him as the supreme sultan. One day after he approved Barkyārūq’s request, the caliph died suddenly as well.⁴⁷⁶

Al-Ghazālī spent four years in Baghdad under these circumstances. It is safe to assume that he was one of the main players in politics during this time. He was close to the caliph al-Muqtadī, and supported al-Mustazhir’s accession to the throne after him. Malikshāh and Terken Hatun attempted several times to nominate Ja‘far for the position, but with no success. There is no direct report about al-Ghazālī’s involvement in the caliphal matters of succession, but he opposed Terken Hatun when she wanted to secure the appointment of Mahmud to the Saljuq throne. He issued a fatwa against the legitimacy of this accession on the basis that the

⁴⁷⁴ Abdülkerim Özeydin, “Berkıaruk,” *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi*, İstanbul, 1992, v. 5, pp. 514-516.

⁴⁷⁵ For Tutush, see Abdülkerim Özeydin, “Tutuş,” *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi*, İstanbul, 2012, v. 41, 446–449.

⁴⁷⁶ Angelika Hartman, “Muktedî-Biemrillâh,” *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi*, İstanbul, 2006, v. 31, 142–143; Carole Hillenbrand, “1092: A Murderous Year,” in *Proceedings of the 14th Congress of the Union Européenne des Arabisants et Islamisants*, Budapest, 1995, 283–285.

first condition of the legitimate ruler is to be mature enough to rule.⁴⁷⁷ He included the same opinion in *al-Mustazhirī*, where he listed the characteristics of the legitimate ruler.⁴⁷⁸ He was also present in the caliph's court during al-Muqtadī's recognition of Tutush as the supreme sultan. This might have resulted unfavorably for al-Ghazālī after Barkyārūq's victory over Tutush.⁴⁷⁹

3.3 Doubts on al-Ghazālī's Narration of his Departure from Baghdad

Al-Ghazālī does not talk about the politics of Baghdad and his involvement in it in *Deliverer*. He narrates his departure from Baghdad in the mysticism section of the book, and the context in which it is given pertains to otherworldly concerns. According to al-Ghazālī's narration, the departure came after his acquaintance with the works of the Sufis. He also came to the conclusion of his life-long quest for certain knowledge by finding the answer in Sufism. His previous search for it in theology (*kalām*), philosophy, and the doctrine of *ta'lim* had not yielded satisfying results.⁴⁸⁰

⁴⁷⁷ Turan, *Selçuklular Tarihi*, 177.

⁴⁷⁸ Al-Ghazālī, *Faḍā'ih*, 180.

⁴⁷⁹ Duncan B. MacDonald, "The Life of al-Ghazzālī, with Especial Reference to His Religious Experiences and Opinions," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 1899, v. 20, 80, and 98. MacDonald also draws attention to the fact that al-Ghazālī left his teaching position in Baghdad after Barkyārūq's arrival in the city, and returned to teaching in Nishapur after the death of Barkyārūq. For other speculations about his departure see Mustafa Çağrı, "Gazzâlî," *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi*, Istanbul, 1996, v. 13, 492.

⁴⁸⁰ This is the main theme of *Deliverer*. Al-Ghazālī gives the impression that he completely severed his connection with these disciplines and embraced Sufism during the second phase of his life. See al-Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh min al-Ḍalāl*, in *Majmū'at Rasā'il Imām al-Ghazālī*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, 1997), v. 7, 56–63; W. Montgomery Watt, *The Faith and Practice of al-Ghazālī* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1953), especially 54–58.

Influenced by the works of the Sufis, in this account, al-Ghazālī realized after long contemplation that his glorious life in Baghdad would not lead him toward salvation in the hereafter. He believed he could find salvation by withdrawing from fame, his prestigious position, and his worldly gains. He oscillated between the attachments of this world and the felicity of eternal life for six months. These tensions in his soul reached such a point that he lost his health, and he became unable to digest food or speak. The doctors could not find the reason for his sickness or a cure for it, and concluded that it was a sickness of the heart, not the body. The only thing for him to do at this stage was to seek refuge in God for his recovery.⁴⁸¹ After God returned some of his bodily power, al-Ghazālī decided to leave his wealth, position, family, and friends. Strangely however, he misinformed them about his destination. He told them that his destination was Mecca, but he in fact set out for Syria.⁴⁸² He justifies this misinformation with the excuse that the caliph and his friends would have opposed his decision to reside in Syria.⁴⁸³ He departed from Baghdad in 488/1095, leaving behind the first phase of his life.⁴⁸⁴

Al-Ghazālī's narration of his departure from Baghdad is still the most widely circulated account of his life and thought. However, it is not accepted by all as the definitive

⁴⁸¹ Al-Ghazālī, *Munqidh*, 59–61; Watt, *Faith and Practice*, 54–58.

⁴⁸² It must be remembered that after the death of Tutush, Syria was still under the control of his sons. See Faruk Sümer, "Suriye Selçukluları," in "Selçuklular," *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi*, İstanbul, 2009, v. 36, 385–386.

⁴⁸³ Al-Ghazālī, *Munqidh*, 61; Watt, *Faith and Practice*, 59.

⁴⁸⁴ According to 'Abd al-Husayn Zarrinkūb, al-Ghazālī's objective in offering this misinformation was to avoid being recognized in the places he visited. After all, he was escaping from fame. See *Firār az Madrasa: Dar Bara-i Zandagi va Andisha-i Abū Hāmid Ghazzālī* (Tehran: Silsila-i Intishārāt Anjuman-i Āthār-i Millī, 1353), 133–138; in Turkish, *Medreseden Kaçış: İmam Gazzâlî'nin Hayatı Fikirleri ve Eserleri*, tr.Hikmet Soylu (İstanbul: Anka Yayınları, 2001), 133–137.

account of his life, and there are convincing challenges to its historical accuracy. One such challenge is offered by Kenneth Garden, who presents another account of al-Ghazālī's inner self before his departure from Baghdad through an analysis of another of al-Ghazālī's books, *The Scale of Action*, which was written right before the departure.⁴⁸⁵

According to Garden, al-Ghazālī's main concern in Baghdad before his departure, as understood from *Scale*, was neither to achieve certitude in knowledge nor to attain personal salvation, as al-Ghazālī depicts himself in *Deliverer* more than ten years later. The mode of the writer of *Scale* is different from al-Ghazālī as depicted in *Deliverer*. The main concern of the writer of *Scale* is how to instruct others in the pursuit of felicity in the hereafter. This person is extremely confident in his intellectual achievements, to the extent that he does not have any reservation about claiming the position of instructor in such lofty matters. He is the master of various methods which, followed properly, would lead to felicity in the hereafter. These methods are philosophy and Sufism, and he adds to them his own supreme way, which is the combination of both. He represents himself as the only person who has this knowledge⁴⁸⁶ and the only person who is faultless in conduct,⁴⁸⁷ and thus as the qualified guide for his age.⁴⁸⁸

⁴⁸⁵ Garden, *The First Islamic Reviver*, 30–59; "Revisiting al-Ghazālī's Crisis through his *Scale for Action* (*Mīzān al-'Amal*)," in *Islam and Rationality: The Impact of Al-Ghazālī: Papers Collected on His 900th Anniversary*, ed. Georges Tamer (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2015), v.1, 207–228.

⁴⁸⁶ In al-Ghazālī's words, *shurūt hadhā al-amr lā tazhar fī al-a'sār illā li wāhid fard shādh* (The qualification for this matter do not appear in the ages except in a single rare individual.), al-Ghazālī, *Mīzān al-'Amal*, ed. Sulaymān Salīm al-Bawwāb (Damascus and Beirut: Manshūrāt Dār al-Ḥikmah, 1986), 24; Garden, "Revisiting al-Ghazālī's Crisis," 224.

⁴⁸⁷ In al-Ghazālī's words, *wa innamā al-munabbih 'alayhā wā'iz zakīy al-sīrah wa qad khalat al-bilād 'anhu* (Truly, the one who would make them aware of this is a preacher of faultless conduct and the land is empty of them.), al-Ghazālī, *Mīzān*, p. 20; Garden, "Revisiting al-Ghazālī's Crisis," 226.

⁴⁸⁸ Garden, "Revisiting al-Ghazālī's Crisis," 224; *First Islamic Reviver*, 57.

Garden rightfully takes this person as the forerunner of the divinely appointed renewer of *Deliverer*.⁴⁸⁹

According to *Scale*, Garden argues, al-Ghazālī's self-confidence and high opinion of his own self did not come from the insights he gained in the practice of Sufism, since he had not fully embraced it at the time he wrote the book. In fact, al-Ghazālī suggests in the book that a prominent Sufi had refused to allow him to participate in the practice of Sufism.⁴⁹⁰ On this basis, it is safe to assume that he already had these convictions before he left Baghdad. He embraced Sufism as an identity in order to present himself as an inspiring model for those who, he thought, needed guidance. After all, the best guidance is guidance by example.⁴⁹¹

As mentioned above, al-Ghazālī's supreme way of attaining felicity is a combination of philosophy and Sufism, which means that he did not sever his connection to philosophy during the second phase of his life. However, al-Ghazālī adapted this strategy in order to widen his audience as much as possible. It seems that he did not want to leave anybody behind; he prescribed philosophy for the elite and Sufism for the majority who were not qualified for it.⁴⁹²

It must be noted that according to Josef Van Ess, al-Ghazālī's reliance on philosophy as a cure for those who need guidance is a direct result of his efforts to refute the doctrine of *ta'lim*, instruction by an infallible Imam. Al-Ghazālī always asserts in his polemical works against this sect that instruction by the Imam is unnecessary because reason, if guided by the

⁴⁸⁹ Garden, "Revisiting al-Ghazālī's Crisis," 225. See *Munqidh*, 76; Watt, *Faith and Practice*, 75.

⁴⁹⁰ Al-Ghazālī, *Mīzān*, 38–39.

⁴⁹¹ Garden, "Revisiting al-Ghazālī's Crisis," 226.

⁴⁹² Garden, "Revisiting al-Ghazālī's Crisis," 226.

infallible method of logic, must lead to certainty.⁴⁹³ In this manner, al-Ghazālī was constrained to accept the infallibility of the Aristotelian logic, and afterwards he forced the rest of the theologians to accept the power of logic. From that point on, logic was considered to be an indispensable part of spiritual wealth, and al-Ghazālī opened another way for those who were not gifted for logic. This way was the way of Sufism.⁴⁹⁴

The information derived from *Scale* undermines the integrity of al-Ghazālī's presentation of his circumstances before his departure offered in *Deliverer*. Considered in conjunction with his immediate political surroundings during the time, it is reasonable to believe that there were other factors which played a role in his departure from the city. Also, his vows to sever his connections with the politicians at the tomb of Abraham in Jerusalem allow some space for speculation in this direction.⁴⁹⁵ Still, unfortunately, it is impossible to determine specifically what these factors were. Nevertheless, al-Ghazālī returned from his departure not as a world-renouncing Sufi, but as an ambitious scholar who wanted to radically transform the religious landscape of his time through the implementation of his newly invented science of the hereafter.

3.4 Al-Ghazālī's Acquaintance with *Rasā'il* before His Departure from Baghdad

⁴⁹³ Al-Ghazālī refers to *al-Qistāṣ al-Mustakīm* when he asserts this point in *Deliverer*. See *Munqidh*, 52. He claims in *Qistāṣ* that these rules were taught to the believers by the Qur'an. See *al-Qistāṣ al-Mustakīm* in *Majmū'at Rasā'il al-Imām al-Ghazālī*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1986), v. 3, 5–64.

⁴⁹⁴ Josef Van Ess, "Skepticism in Islamic Religious Thought," in *God and Man in Contemporary Islamic Thought*, ed. Charles Malik, (Beirut: American University of Beirut Centennial Publications, 1972), 95–98; see also Mitha, *al-Ghazālī and the Ismailis*, 92–93.

⁴⁹⁵ Al-Ghazālī, *Makātib-e Fārsi-ye Ghazālī be-nam Faḍā'il al-Anām min Rasā'il Hujjāt al-Islam*, ed. 'Abbās Iqbāl (Tehran: Ketab-furūshi-ya Ibn Sīnā, 1333), 5.

It was mentioned previously that al-Ghazālī's opponents had accused him of reading *Rasā'il* during the heated phases of the Nishapur controversy.⁴⁹⁶ This accusation and al-Ghazālī's implicit acceptance of it in *Deliverer* can be taken as a clear sign of his knowledge of the content of *Rasā'il*. This controversy, however, erupted during the final years of al-Ghazālī's life, and he had already published many important works before this period. Since the intention of this study is to talk about the influence of *Rasā'il* on al-Ghazālī, it is necessary to show that al-Ghazālī's involvement with them goes back to an earlier period. In fact, this seems to be the assertion of his opponents as well. Accordingly, it will be argued in this section that al-Ghazālī had read *Rasā'il* before his departure from Baghdad in 488/1095. This will be done first based on the information he gave in *Deliverer*, and second through providing examples of similarities between *Rasā'il* and some of the works which he wrote before his departure from Baghdad.

When al-Ghazālī lists the four classes of the seekers of truth in *Deliverer*, he puts the doctrine of *ta'līm* in the second place, after the theologians (*mutakallimūn*) and before the philosophers.⁴⁹⁷ This listing gives the impression that he followed this order in his investigation of these schools. In the following pages of the book, however, it is seen that al-Ghazālī puts the investigation of philosophy in the second place, after the investigation of theology and before the investigation of the doctrine of *ta'līm*. He states in the account of philosophy that he had studied philosophy for two years during his free time from teaching and instructing three hundred students in Baghdad.⁴⁹⁸ *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*

⁴⁹⁶ Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyyah al-Kubrā*, ed. 'Abd al-Fattāḥ Muḥammad al-Ḥilū and Maḥmūd Muḥammad al-Tanāhī (Cairo: Maṭba'at 'Isā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1968), v. 6, 241. Al-Māzarī says "*arrafanī ba'd aṣḥābih annahū kāna lahū 'ukūf 'alā Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*."

⁴⁹⁷ Al-Ghazālī, *Munqidh*, 31; Watt, *Faith and Practice*, 26.

⁴⁹⁸ Al-Ghazālī, *Munqidh*, 35; Watt, *Faith and Practice*, 30.

was the product of this study, and it was composed before his departure from Baghdad.⁴⁹⁹ Al-Ghazālī talks about the dangers of Ikhwān al-Safā in this section, which implies that one of the philosophical texts he studied during this time was *Rasā'il*.⁵⁰⁰

Al-Ghazālī mentions Ikhwān al-Safā again in the account of the doctrine of *ta'līm*, which comprises the third section of the book. He states that he collected all their books and studied them thoroughly in order to refute their teachings with his own, at least in part as the result of the encouragement of the caliph. It is highly possible that some of the books he collected in connection with the doctrine of *ta'līm* were *Rasā'il*, since he mentions them again in this section. The context in which he mentions them is as follows: After exposing the worthless nature of the doctrine of *ta'līm* throughout the section, he states that there are certain people in this sect who claim to have access to special kind of knowledge. But he finds out that the special knowledge they have access to is merely trifling details of the philosophy of Pythagoras, the philosopher whom the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā followed in their *Rasā'il*.⁵⁰¹ The most important product of his involvement with the doctrine of *ta'līm* was *The Infamies of the Batiniyya and the Virtues of the Mustazhirriya*, and this book as well was composed before his departure from Baghdad.⁵⁰²

Besides the information *Deliverer* provides, there are also some passages in the works written before al-Ghazālī's departure that seem to be taken from *Rasā'il*. The reference for these passages is going to be several articles of Jules Janssens in which he compares al-

⁴⁹⁹ Hourani, "Revised Chronology," 292–293.

⁵⁰⁰ Obviously, the testimony of al-Ghazālī about his study of philosophy has not been accepted by all scholars, some of whom assert that he studied philosophy earlier than this period. See, for example, Griffel, *al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, 97–98.

⁵⁰¹ Al-Ghazālī, *Munqidh*, 54–55; Watt, *Faith and Practice*, 53.

⁵⁰² Hourani, "Revised Chronology," 293.

Ghazālī's works with the works of al-Rāghib al-Isfahānī and Ibn Sīnā. It will be seen that connections can be found with *Rasā'il* for the passages for which Janssens cannot find any connection to these two authors and deems to be al-Ghazālī's own invention.

Jules Janssens compares al-Ghazālī's *The Scale of Action* with al-Rāghib al-Isfahānī's *Kitāb al-Dharī'a ilā makārim al-Sharī'a*⁵⁰³ and Ibn Sīnā's *Aḥwāl al-Nafs* and concludes that al-Ghazālī relied heavily on these works during the composition of his book.⁵⁰⁴ For the content Janssens can find similar passages to in the works of these two authors, it is possible to say that the similar passages can be found in *Rasā'il* as well. For example, in chapter four, al-Ghazālī insists on the importance of self-knowledge and Janssens traces the origin of this notion back to al-Isfahānī's book. Immediately after this subject, al-Ghazālī moves on to elaborate the faculties of the animal and human souls. This time, Janssens traces the origin of this section back to Ibn Sīnā's work. However, both these subjects are recurring themes in *Rasā'il*,⁵⁰⁵ and, moreover, they can be found together at the same place in the twenty-third epistle, entitled *fī tarkīb al-jasad* (on the composition of corporeal body).⁵⁰⁶

⁵⁰³ Yasien Mohamed argues convincingly that al-Ghazālī's treatment of the duties of the teacher in *Scale* was inspired by al-Isfahānī's work, see his "The Duties of the Teacher: al-Isfahānī's *Dharī'a* as a Source of Inspiration for al-Ghazālī's *Mizān al-'Amal*," *Islam and Rationality: The Impact of Al-Ghazālī: Papers Collected on His 900th Anniversary*, ed. Georges Tamer (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2015), v.1, 186–206. But again, similar ideas concerning the duties of the teacher can be found in *Rasā'il*. For a detailed analysis of the subject of education in Ikhwān, see Ahmet Koç, *İhvan-ı Safa'nın Eğitim Felsefesi*, Istanbul: Marmara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Vakfı, 1999, for the duties of the teacher see especially 95–103.

⁵⁰⁴ Jules Janssens, "al-Ghazālī's *Mizān al-'Amal*: An Ethical Summa Based on Ibn Sīnā and al-Rāghib al-Isfahānī,"

⁵⁰⁵ *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' wa Khullān al-Wafā'*, ed. 'Ārif Tāmīr (Beirut and Paris: Manshūrāt 'Uwaydāt, 1995), v. 1, 103–104; v. 2, 275, 292; v. 3, 308; v. 4, 140, 160.

⁵⁰⁶ *Rasā'il*, v. 2, 291–302.

Janssens continues to find similarities between these two authors and al-Ghazālī in the fifth chapter of *Scale* as well. The similarities he finds are also present in the twenty-third epistle of Ikhwān. In addition to these similarities, there is one issue for which Janssens cannot find any corollary in these sources and which he considers to be a personal addition of al-Ghazālī. This issue is al-Ghazālī's insistence on the idea that the intricate nature of the human soul provides strong evidence for the existence of God. This idea is definitely not an original invention of al-Ghazālī, since the Ikhwān argue this point as well in the final part of the epistle named above.⁵⁰⁷

Janssens treats al-Ghazālī's use of Ibn Sīnā's works in other articles as well. In one of them, he attempts to offer a solution to the problem of the chronology of al-Ghazālī's works by comparing their content with Ibn Sīnā's works.⁵⁰⁸ The offer Janssens brings forward for chronology does not seem feasible, but during the process of comparison he points out some differences between al-Ghazālī and Ibn Sīnā. For example, when comparing their treatments of the doctrine of inner senses Janssens notices some additions in al-Ghazālī which he cannot find in Ibn Sīnā.⁵⁰⁹ One of the additions al-Ghazālī makes over the treatment of Ibn Sīnā is his use of the example of wax as a metaphor for the faculty of representation. Janssens deems this to be a personal addition of al-Ghazālī.⁵¹⁰ However, the example of wax is present in Ikhwān's treatment of the faculty of representation, where they give a short account of five

⁵⁰⁷ Compare al-Ghazālī, *Mīzān al-'Amal*, 32–34 with *Rasā'il*, v. 2, 300–302. See also Janssens, "al-Ghazālī's *Mīzān al-'Amal*," 125.

⁵⁰⁸ Jules Janssens, "al-Ghazālī, and His Use of Avicennian Texts," in *Problems in Arabic Philosophy*, ed. Miklos Maroth (Piscataway: The Avicenna Institute of Middle Eastern Studies, 2003), 37–49.

⁵⁰⁹ Janssens compares here al-Ghazālī's *Maqāṣid al-Falāsifah* with Ibn Sīnā's *Dānesh-Nāmeḥ*, and argues furthermore that *Maqāṣid* is not precursory of *Tahāfut*.

⁵¹⁰ Janssens, "al-Ghazālī, and His Use of Avicennian Texts," 42.

inner senses in the twenty-fourth epistle under the title of *fī al-ḥāss wa al-maḥsūs wa fī tahdhīb al-naḥs wa islāḥ al-akhlāq* (on the sense and sensible, with respect to refinement of the soul and the reforming of the characters).⁵¹¹

Beyond these textual similarities between al-Ghazālī and Ikhwān, there are also other speculations which support the possibility of al-Ghazālī's early acquaintance with *Rasā'il*. These speculations are about the intended target of *Incoherence*. Janssens, again, contributes to these speculations with another article.⁵¹² He argues in this article that, contrary to al-Ghazālī's declaration in the introductions of the book, the primary target of *Tahāfut* is not the philosophy of Ibn Sīnā. Janssens does not completely deny that one of the targets was Ibn Sīnā, but he asserts that Ibn Sīnā may not have been the primary target of the book. Instead of Ibn Sīnā, he mentions Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' as one of the possible targets and reminds the reader of al-Ghazālī's negative comments on the philosophy of Ikhwān in *Deliverer*.⁵¹³ Janssens speculations seem to have merit, and for an example of the existence of textual similarities between *Incoherence* and *Rasā'il*, one may look at the beginning of the second position of the seventeenth discussion and a certain passage of the third epistle of Ikhwān.⁵¹⁴ If this is the case, one may safely conclude that al-Ghazālī was well acquainted with the content of *Rasā'il* before his departure from Baghdad in 488/1095.

⁵¹¹ See al-Ghazālī, *Maqāṣid al-Falāsifah*, ed. Sulaymān Dunyā (Tehran: Shams Tabrīzī, 1382), 356 and *Rasā'il*, v. 2, 315.

⁵¹² Jules Janssens, "al-Ghazālī's *Tahāfut*: is It Really a Rejection of Ibn Sīnā's Philosophy?" *Journal of Islamic Studies*, Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies, 12:1, 2001, 1–17.

⁵¹³ Janssens, "al-Ghazālī's *Tahāfut*," 16; in addition to Janssens, Mahmut Kaya suggests the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' as a possible target of al-Ghazālī's attacks as well. See his "Preface," in Gazzālī, *Filozofların Tutarsızlığı*, tr. Mahmut Kaya and Hüseyin Sarioğlu (Istanbul: Klasik Yayınları, 2005), viii–ix; "Tehāfütü'l-Felāsife," *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi*, Istanbul, 2011, v. 40, 313.

⁵¹⁴ Compare al-Ghazālī, *The Incoherence*, 171–172 with *Rasā'il*, v. 1, 163–164.

3. 5 Al-Ghazālī's Science of the Hereafter

It was mentioned above that al-Ghazālī had displayed some signs of discontent toward the traditional order of the practical science of philosophy during the last days of his stay in Baghdad. As a result of this discontent, he placed ethics at the top of the practical sciences by putting it above economics and politics. This attitude is visible in the works he wrote during the final days of his life in Baghdad.⁵¹⁵ These works, especially *The Scale of Action*, display al-Ghazālī's frustrations with the existing conditions of the time and indicate his craving for a more effective and meaningful system of living. The outcome of this craving was his declaration of the Science of the Hereafter, of which *The Revival of the Religious Sciences* was intended to be the practical component ('ilm al-mu'āmalah).⁵¹⁶ However, the *Revival* also includes valuable information about the theoretical part ('ilm al-mukāshafah)⁵¹⁷ of this new science as well. In order to determine the exact nature of this science, it is necessary to outline what al-Ghazālī says about it. This will be done on the basis of the information he provides in *Revival* and *The Jewels of the Qur'ān* (*Jawāhir al-Qur'ān*).

Al-Ghazālī lays out the foundation of the Science of the Hereafter at the beginning of *The Revival of the Religious Sciences*. He immediately begins to address his opponent, imaginary or real, in the exordium of the *Revival* without following the convention of the scholarly tradition of including a proper opening.⁵¹⁸ He labels the opponent as a heedless

⁵¹⁵ Al-Ghazālī, *Faḍā'ih al-Bāṭiniyyah*, 198–199; Garden, *First Islamic Reviver*, 53–55.

⁵¹⁶ Kenneth Garden argues that the Science of the Hereafter was al-Ghazālī's own invention and major vehicle of his revivalist agenda. See his *First Islamic Reviver*, 63.

⁵¹⁷ I do not feel completely satisfied in defining this science as theoretical, since al-Ghazālī's presentation of it is ambiguous. But theoretical seems the most convenient term for it.

⁵¹⁸ Al-Ghazālī's praise of God and invocation of prayer for the Prophet is shorter than usual. For a discussion of this issue, see Murtadā al-Zabīdī, *Ithāf al-Sādat al-Muttaqīn bi-sharḥ Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, Dār al-Fikr, v. 1, 56.

slanderer, a rejecter of open truths, a lover of ignorance and a relier on insignificant matters. Here al-Ghazālī introduces death as the most powerful motive of his discourse. He says that the opponent acts recklessly because, like most people, he is overpowered by an epidemic⁵¹⁹ which diverts him from understanding that the hereafter is coming and the world is retreating. The opponent does not realize that death is near, the journey is long, the provision is little, or the path is blocked.⁵²⁰

The solution must be then the removal of the blockage in front of the path. But this alone is not enough and there must be guides throughout the path. According to al-Ghazālī, it is difficult for men to travel along the path without the guidance of scholars (*‘ulamā’*), who are the heirs of the prophets. But, al-Ghazālī asserts, they are rare at the time. Those who claim to be the heirs are instead imitators tricked by Satan with the immediate fortune of the world. They replace good with evil and evil with good. It is for this reason that the science of religion disappeared and the true religion was extinguished all over the world.⁵²¹

These imitators represent three kind of knowledge and give the impression to people that there exists none beside their sciences. These three are the rulings of the government (*fatwā*) used by the judge to settle disputes, the methods of theological dispute (*jadal*) used by the seeker of vanity to overcome and silence his opponents, and the art of ornamented speech

According to Garden, al-Ghazālī wants to shock the reader with a sense of crisis, see *First Islamic Reviver*, pp. 105-107; see also his “Al-Ghazālī’s Contested Revival: *Iḥyā’ Ulūm al-Dīn* and its Critics in Khorasan and the Maghrib” (PhD Dissertation, University of Chicago, 2005), 19.

⁵¹⁹ The notion of disease is an important tool in al-Ghazālī’s discourse. It will be clear at the end of the exordium that the aim of the book is to cure the diseases of the soul which, unlike the body, constitutes the real aspect of human nature.

⁵²⁰ Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’*, v. 1, 10.

⁵²¹ Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’*, v. 1, 10.

(*ifhām* or *saja‘ muzakhraf*) used by the preacher to draw the attention of the multitude and win them over. They collect illegal profit and the wealth of this world by practicing these three sciences.⁵²²

On the other hand, according to al-Ghazālī, these are not the sciences practiced by the righteous forebears (*al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*). The science practiced by them is the Science of the Hereafter which God describes in his book as understanding (*fiqh*),⁵²³ wisdom, light, guidance, and righteousness. But the true science has long since disappeared among men and been completely forgotten.⁵²⁴ Since this is a grave disaster and calamity that has befallen religion and its adherents, al-Ghazālī felt responsible to revive the sciences of religion and composed the book. His intention was to show the methods of the former leaders of religion (*al-a‘immah al-mutaqaddimīn*) and the sciences of the prophets and the righteous forebears.⁵²⁵

Al-Ghazālī divides the Science of the Hereafter into two parts: the science of unveiling (*‘ilm al-mukāshafah*) and the science of practice (*‘ilm al-mu‘āmalah*). He does not give much information about the science of unveiling in the exordium and says that recording it in books is not permitted. However, he adds that the science of unveiling is the ultimate goal of the journey. The prophets and the scholars guide people towards it by showing the way and do

⁵²² Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’*, v. 1, 10.

⁵²³ Here he does not use the word *fiqh* as the science of jurisprudence, but as the thorough understanding of religion. The first hadith he reports in “the Book of Knowledge,” which is the first book of *Revival*, is that “If God wishes good for one, He gives him understanding in religion (*yufaqqihhu fī al-dīn*).” *Iḥyā’*, v. 1, 14.

⁵²⁴ Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’*, v. 1, 10.

⁵²⁵ Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’*, v. 1, 11.

not talk about it except by allegorical signs and symbols. They do not reveal it completely because ordinary minds are incapable of comprehending its content.⁵²⁶

The science of practice is about the acquisition of knowledge revealed by the science of unveiling as well as acting in accordance with this knowledge. Al-Ghazālī is not completely clear here.⁵²⁷ But it is safe to think that the knowledge mentioned together with practice must be a part of the science of unveiling that was revealed gradually by the prophets and saints to ordinary men in order to provide a basis for action. If followed properly in accordance with the guidance of the scholars, the action results in the acquisition of the total content of the science of unveiling. In fact, as a total instruction in the science of practice, the *Revival* itself and its author assume the position of guide.

The science of practice is divided into two parts as well: the external (*ẓāhir*) and the internal (*bāṭin*). Things related to the body comprise the external, while things related to the heart constitute the internal. It must be noted here that in al-Ghazālī's terminology, heart means soul.⁵²⁸ He briefly mentions that it is something which is distinct from bodily organs and belongs to the world of dominion (*‘ālam al-malakūt*). This point will be explored subsequently in the study. Things related to the body are also classified under two sections: the acts of worship and the acts of daily life. Following the same pattern again, things related

⁵²⁶ Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’*, v. 1, 12. Understanding the word ‘ilm in *‘ilm al-mukāshafah* as science seems slightly misleading to me. It makes more sense when it is understood as knowledge, since the science of unveiling consists of the direct knowledge of the articles of faith and dogma after the removal of the obstacles from the eye of the soul.

⁵²⁷ Al-Ghazālī seems to have faced this ambiguity in *Scale* before the composition of *Revival*, but does not answer it clearly here either. See *Mīzān*, 21.

⁵²⁸ Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’*, v. 3, 4.

to the heart are classified under two sections as well: its praiseworthy conditions and its blameworthy conditions.⁵²⁹

Al-Ghazālī brings medicine into the discourse when he explains the second reason for presenting the science of practice in four quarters. He observes that the science of jurisprudence (*fiqh*) attracts the attention of those young men who want to become popular in worldly matters by using its prestige and influence. This science is divided into four parts and by making the science of practice similar to it, he wants to create some interest in those young men.⁵³⁰ This strategy was followed by the one who wanted to attract the attention of the rulers to the science of medicine by presenting it in the form of an astrological table. So attracting the attention of the young to the science of practice, which is beneficial for eternal life, is more valuable than attracting it to the science of medicine, which is beneficial only for this life. The benefit of the science of practice, which treats the hearts and souls for an eternal life,

⁵²⁹ Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ*, v. 1, 13.

⁵³⁰ Al-Ghazālī uses the proverb “*al-mutazzayyiʾ bi-zayy al-maḥbūb maḥbūb*” (He who dresses like the beloved is also beloved.), *Iḥyāʾ*, v. 1, 13. Kenneth Garden thinks that al-Ghazālī means here the roots of jurisprudence (*usūl al-fiqh*) and gives accordingly the four sources of *usūl al-fiqh*, which are the Qurʾān, *sunnah*, *ijmāʾ*, and *qiyās*. See his “Al-Ghazālī’s Contested Revival,” 39. However, I think it is more correct to equate al-Ghazālī’s fourfold division with the fourfold division of the science of jurisprudence (*fiqh*), not with the four sources of the roots of the science of jurisprudence (*usūl al-fiqh*). In fact, al-Ghazālī uses the word *fiqh*, not *usūl al-fiqh*, in this context. The divisions of *fiqh* are *ʿibadāt*, *muʿāmalāt*, *munākahāt*, and *ʿuqubāt*. He also talks about this division of *fiqh* in his *Jawāhir al-Qurʾān wa Duraruh*, ed. Hadījah Muhammad Kāmil and ʿIffat al-Sharqāwī (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub wa al-Wathāʾiq al-Qawmiyyah), 81. For further information about this division, see Bilal Aybakan, “Füruʾ Fıkıh Sistematiği Üzerine,” *Marmara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, v. 31, 2006/2, 5–32; ʿAbd al-Wahhāb Ibrāhīm Sulaymān, *Tartīb Mawḍūʾāt al-Fiqhiyyah wa Munāsabatuh fī al-Madhāhib al-ʿArbaʿah* (Mecca: Jāmiʿat Umm al-Qurāʾ, 1988), 60.

is inexpressibly superior to the science of medicine, which treats the body, doomed by necessity to decay in a short while.⁵³¹

Al-Ghazālī provides more detail about the Science of the Hereafter in the first book of *Revival*, the Book of Knowledge (*Kitāb al-‘ilm*), even though what he provides, he says, does not include all of its details. He repeats the major division of the Science: the science of unveiling and the science of practice.⁵³²

About the science of unveiling, al-Ghazālī says that it is the science of the internal (*bāṭin*) and the utmost aim of all sciences. This knowledge is the guarantor of salvation for its holder, cannot be attained by the heretics, the arrogant, or by those who insistently desire this world through the pursuit of the worldly sciences. The least punishment of the denier of this knowledge is that he will never taste its sweetness.⁵³³

The science of unveiling is the science of the righteous (*ṣiddīqūn*) and those who are close to God (*muqarrabūn*). It is the light in the heart which shines (*nūr yazharu fī al-qalb*) after it is cleaned and purified from its blameworthy characteristics. The light unveils (*yankashifu*) the darkness, and things heard before and accepted on the authority of hearing appear gradually more clearly in detail.⁵³⁴ The things revealed by this science and attained by its holder are clarified in the following excerpt:

Through it, these truths are clarified until the true knowledge of the essence of God is attained together with that of His eternal and perfect attributes, His works and wisdom in the creation of this world and the hereafter as well as the reason for His

⁵³¹ Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’*, v. 1, 13.

⁵³² Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’*, v. 1, 32.

⁵³³ Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’*, v. 1, 32.

⁵³⁴ Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’*, v. 1, 32.

exalting the latter over the former. Through it also is attained the knowledge of the meaning of prophecy and prophet and the import of revelation. Through it is obtained the truth about Satan, the meaning of the words angels and devils, and the cause of the enmity between Satan and man. Through it is known how the Angel appeared to the prophets and how they received the divine revelation. Through it is achieved the knowledge of the heart and how the angelic hosts have confronted the devils. Through it is gained the knowledge of how to distinguish between the company of heaven and the company of the Devil, a knowledge of the hereafter, Paradise, and hell fire, the punishment of the grave, the bridge (*al-ṣirāt*) across the infernal fire, the balance of the judgment day, and knowledge of the day of reckoning. Through it also is comprehended the meaning of the following words of God: “Read thy Book; there needeth none but thyself to make out an account against thee this day,” and “Truly the hereafter is life indeed, if they but knew.” Through this same light is revealed the meaning of meeting God and seeing His gracious face; the meaning of being close to Him and of occupying a place in His proximity; the meaning of attaining happiness through communion with the heavenly hosts and association with the angels and the prophets. Through it also the distinction between the ranks of the people in the different heavens is determined until they see one another in the same way as a shining star is seen in the middle of heaven.⁵³⁵

According to al-Ghazālī, people first receive the subject matter of this science by hearing and differ from each other in their interpretation of it. Some people think that these are nothing but examples given by God to illustrate what He prepared for his righteous servants, while others accept them as true realities of afterlife. Some people confess their inability to know the true nature and reality of God, while others claim to have precious

⁵³⁵ Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ*, v. 1, 32–33; the excerpt is taken from Nabih Amin Faris, “The Book of Knowledge” (New Delhi: Islamic Book Service), 40–41.

knowledge about Him. And for some, the utmost knowledge one can have about God is what is contained in the manuals of creed, such as that He is ever-existing (*mawjūd*), all-knowledgeable (*ālīm*), all-powerful (*qādir*), all-hearing (*samīʿ*), all-seeing (*baṣīr*), and with the attribute of speech (*mutakallim*).⁵³⁶

All speculations about the exact nature of these things will come to an end after the lifting of the veil, since they will be as clear as if they were witnessed through the eyes, thus leaving no room for any doubt (*yajrī majrā al-ʿiyān alladhī lā yashukku fīh*). And this is what he means by the science of unveiling. What is attained at this moment cannot be written in books and cannot be communicated to anyone except to those worthy of it.⁵³⁷ Al-Ghazālī asserts that achieving this level is naturally possible for humans (*hādihā mumkin fī jawhar al-insān*) if they clean the rust and the impurities of the world from the mirror of their hearts (*mirʾāt al-qalb*).⁵³⁸ The rust and impurities accumulated in the heart become veils that hinder the true comprehension of the content given above.⁵³⁹ They can be cleaned from the heart by refraining from lusts and following the footsteps of the prophets in all their states as much as possible. The content revealed to the heart and shined upon it will be proportional to the dirt

⁵³⁶ Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ*, v. 1, 33.

⁵³⁷ It is generally considered that al-Ghazālī revealed the content of this knowledge in his esoteric works. This will be discussed later.

⁵³⁸ Again, heart means soul in his terminology.

⁵³⁹ *Al-ʿilm bi-kayfiyat taṣqīl hādhih al-mirʾāh ʿan hādhih al-khabāʾith allatī hiya al-ḥijāb ʿan Allāh subḥānah wa taʾālā wa ʿan maʾrifat sifātih wa afʾālih. Iḥyāʾ*, v. 1, 33.

cleaned from it. The Science of the Hereafter is the way which instructs how to polish the mirror of the heart.⁵⁴⁰

The second part of the Science of the Hereafter is the science of practice. This science is concerned about the states of the heart. Al-Ghazālī lists the praiseworthy and blameworthy states of the heart in a similar manner, which constitutes the second part of *Revival*. He says that the praiseworthy states are the fountain-head of obedience and acts which bring one closer to God. On the other hand, the blameworthy states are the seed-beds of immoral behavior and the gardens of corruption. The Science of the Hereafter, again, is the knowledge of their definitions, realities, reasons, results, and treatments. According to those who acquired it, this science is an obligation for everybody (*farḍ ‘ayn*).⁵⁴¹

Al-Ghazālī gives a similar account of the Science of the Hereafter in *The Jewels of the Qur’ān*. The context is slightly different in this book, but it does not constitute any change in doctrine. Al-Ghazālī likens the Qur’ān to an ocean with lots of secret valuables and jewels. The valuables and jewels represent the sciences derived from the Qur’ān and they have a hierarchy among them based on their proximity to the aim (*fī al-qurb wa al-bu‘d min al-maqṣūd*). He further likens the verses of the Qur’ān to a single sea-shell (*ṣadaf*) and that demonstrates his meaning more clearly. For some people, the sea-shell consists only of the external shell. However, some people break the shell and carefully examine the pearl inside.

⁵⁴⁰ Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’*, v. 1, 33. It is important to keep in mind that instead of mentioning the science of unveiling here al-Ghazālī mentions the Science of the Hereafter, which includes the science of practice as well. This suggests that the border between the science of unveiling and the science of practice is transitional.

⁵⁴¹ Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’*, v. 1, 33–34.

In correspondence with this simile al-Ghazālī divides the religious sciences into the sciences of the shell (*ṣadaḥ*) and the sciences of the pith (*lubb*).⁵⁴²

The sciences of the shell are those sciences which are concerned with the language of the Qur’ān and its correct transmission to later generations.⁵⁴³ The sciences of the pith are divided into two parts again: those of lower grade (*al-ṭabaqat al-suflā*) and those of higher grade (*al-ṭabaqat al-‘ulyā*). In correspondence with the sciences of the world given in the exordium and the first book of *Revival*, al-Ghazālī lists story telling (*ma’rifat qiṣaṣ al-Qur’ān*), religious dispute and argumentation (*‘ilm al-kalām*), and jurisprudence (*fiqh*) as the three branches of the lower grade.⁵⁴⁴

The higher grade corresponds exactly to the Science of the Hereafter al-Ghazālī describes in the *Revival*. He explicates the higher grade as follows:

(1) The higher grade of the sciences of the pith consists in those important sciences which are the precedents and roots (*al-sawābiq wa al-uṣūl*). The noblest of these higher sciences is knowledge of God and the Last Day (*al-‘ilm bi-Allāh wa al-yawm al-ākhir*), for this knowledge is of that which is intended (*‘ilm al-maqṣad*). Below this is knowledge of the straight path and of the manner of traversing it (*al-ṣirāt al-mustakīm waṭarīq al-sulūk*). This is the knowledge of purification of the soul and removal of the obstacles of the destructive qualities, and of making the soul beautiful with the saving qualities. We discussed these forms of knowledge in the books of *The Revival of the Religious Sciences*... *Revival* comprises forty books, each of which will guide you to one of the obstacles of the soul together with the method of its removal,

⁵⁴² Al-Ghazālī, *Jawāhir al-Qur’ān*, 78.

⁵⁴³ Al-Ghazālī, *Jawāhir al-Qur’ān*, 78–81.

⁵⁴⁴ Al-Ghazālī, *Jawāhir al-Qur’ān*, 81–83.

and to one of the veils of the soul along with the method of lifting it. This is a science which is above the sciences of jurisprudence, theology, and what is before these...

(2) The highest and noblest knowledge is the knowledge of God (*'ilm ma'rifat Allah*), because all other forms of knowledge are sought for the sake of it and it is not sought for anything else. The manner of progression in regard to it is to advance from divine acts to divine attributes, and then from divine attributes to divine essence; thus there are three stages. The highest of these stages is knowledge of divine essence (*'ilm al-dhāt*), and it is not possible for most people to understand this...

(3) This is the nobles of all forms of knowledge, and it is followed in excellence by knowledge of the life to come (*'ilm al-ākhirah*), which is knowledge of final return to God (*'ilm al-ma'ād*), as we have already mentioned in our discussion of the three divisions. This knowledge is connected with the science of gnosis (*'ilm al-ma'rifah*), and its real meaning is knowledge of man's relation to God at the time of being drawn near to Him through knowledge or being veiled from Him by ignorance (*mahjūb bi al-jahl*). Some of the principles of these four types of knowledge, i.e. knowledge of divine essence, attributes and acts, and knowledge of the future life and their confluence, which are that measure of knowledge with which we have been provided despite our short life, many efforts and calamities and few helpers and companions, we set forth in some of our works but did not disclose. Most people's understanding would be wearied by it, and the weak, and who are shallow in knowledge would be harmed by it. Its disclosure is only beneficial to him, who has brought his knowledge of outward acts to perfection, and has followed the path to God by the removal of evil qualities from the soul and the methods of mortification, with the result that his soul has become trained and is on the straight path so that he has no longer any pleasure in the world and only

searches for the True One... It is unlawful for those into whose hands that book falls, to disclose it except to one who has these qualities.⁵⁴⁵

Even though he does not name it explicitly, it is clearly visible that what al-Ghazālī is describing in these three paragraphs is the Science of the Hereafter in its totality.⁵⁴⁶ Accordingly, the first (1) paragraph corresponds to the science of practice, which is dealt with in the *Revival*. The second (2) and the third (3) paragraphs correspond to the science of unveiling, and al-Ghazālī informs the reader that he had written a book (or books) which included the content of this science but that he withheld it from public distribution.⁵⁴⁷

In the second chapter of *Jewels*, al-Ghazālī divides the verses of the Qur’ān into six parts: the first three parts are the precedents and the principles and the second three parts are the complementary and the dependents. When he talks about first three parts of this division,

⁵⁴⁵ Al-Ghazālī, *Jawāhir al-Qur’ān*, 83–85; the translation is taken from Muhammad Abul Quasem, *The Jewels of the Qur’ān: al-Ghazālī’s Theory* (Malaysia: National University of Malaysia, 1977), 42–44

⁵⁴⁶ According to Alexander Treiger as well, this passage is one of the various places in which al-Ghazālī describes his highest theoretical science. See his “al-Ghazālī’s Classifications of the Sciences and Descriptions of the Highest Theoretical Science,” *Dîvân: Disiplinler Arası Çalışmalar Dergisi*, v. 16, no. 30, 2011/1, 10–11.

⁵⁴⁷ This work is known as “*al-Maḍnūn bih ‘Alā Ghayr Ahlih* (that which is to be restricted from those not fit for it). See al-Ghazālī, *al-Arbaʿīn fī Uṣūl al-Dīn*, ed. Muḥammad Muḥammad Jābir (Egypt: Maktabat al-Jundī), 23. According to M. Afifi al-Akiti, this work “sits at the top of al-Ghazālī’s theological curriculum and represents the most sophisticated expression of his theological project. It is in this corpus that al-Ghazālī reveals the extent to which his theologizing has developed: by relying on the scientific and philosophical community, he has constructed a unified theological system giving a reasoned explanation of the world, but expressing his ideas in traditional terms.” See his “The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly of *Falsafa*: al-Ghazālī’s *Maḍnūn*, *Tahāfut*, and *Maqāṣid*, with Particular Attention to Their *Falsafī* Treatments of God’s Knowledge of Temporal Events,” in *Avicenna and His Legacy: A Golden Age of Science and Philosophy*, ed. Y. Tzvi Langermann (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2009), 55.

he gives a similar account of the Science of the Hereafter. The first part (1) is knowledge of God, his essence, his attributes, and his actions. The second part (2) is knowledge of the straight path which is to be taken to get closer to God. The third part (3) is knowledge of what awaits the traveler at the time when attains his goal.⁵⁴⁸ Al-Ghazālī provides detailed information about these parts in the following pages of the book.⁵⁴⁹ In this classification, the first (1) and the third (3) parts correspond to the science of unveiling while the second part (2) corresponds to the science of practice. The second part is informative about the nature of the Science of the Hereafter and includes some of its specific notions. For this reason, it deserves to be quoted in detail:

The second division concerns the definition of the path of advancing towards God. This is by devoting oneself to the service of God as he said “Devote yourself to Him very devoutly.” Devotion to Him is achieved by advancing towards Him and turning away from things other than Him; and this is expressed in His words, “There is no God but He; so take Him for a guardian.” Advancement towards Him can only be achieved by perseverance in remembrance of Him, while turning away from things other than Him is affected by opposing passion, by cleansing oneself from the troubles of this world (*kadūrāt al-dunyā*), and by purification of the soul (*tazkiyat al-qalb*) from them. The result of this purification is prosperity in the Hereafter as God said, “He indeed has achieved prosperity who has purified himself and remembers the name of his Lord and so performs the ritual prayer.” Thus the path is supported by two matters, namely, perseverance in remembrance of God and opposition to that which diverts from Him. This is the journey towards God (*al-safar ilā Allāh*).

In this journey to God there is movement both from the side of the traveler and from the side of Him to Whom he travels... The truth is that the seeker and the Sought

⁵⁴⁸ Al-Ghazālī, *Jawāhir al-Qur’ān*, 69.

⁵⁴⁹ Al-Ghazālī, *Jawāhir al-Qur’ān*, 69–73.

are comparable to a picture present in a mirror (*mithāl sūrah hāḍirah ma ‘a mir’āh*): The picture is not revealed in it because of rust (*ṣada’*) on its surface; when, however, you polish the mirror the picture is revealed in it (*fa-matā ṣaḡaltahā tajallat fīhā al-ṣūrah*), neither by the movement of the picture towards it nor by its movement towards the picture, but by the removal of the veil. God is revealed by His essence and is not concealed, for concealment of light is impossible, and by light everything which is concealed becomes obvious, and God is the light of the heavens and the earth (*Allāh nūr al-samāwāt wa al-arḍ*). The concealment of light from the pupil of the eye is only caused by one of two matters; either by turbidity in the pupil of the eye, or by weakness in it since it is unable to tolerate the great dazzling light just as the eyes of bats are unable to tolerate the light of the sun. Nothing, then, is incumbent upon you except to cleanse turbidity from the eye of the soul (*‘ayn al-qalb*) and to strengthen its pupil. In that case God will be in the soul as the picture is in the mirror, so that when He suddenly reveals Himself in the mirror of the soul, you hasten to say that He is inside the soul and that the human nature (*nāsūt*) has put on the divine nature (*lāhūt*), until God strengthens you with the firm word so that you realize that the picture is not inside the mirror, but reflected in it. If the picture were to rest inside the mirror it would be inconceivable that it could be reflected in many mirrors at one time; rather at that time when it rested inside one mirror, it moved from another. Such, however, is not the fact in the least, for God reveals Himself so many of the Gnostics (*al-‘arīfūn*) at the same time. It is true that He reveals Himself to some mirrors most perfectly, most obviously, most directly, and this is commensurate with the clarity of the mirror, its polish, the correctness of its shape and the right with of its surface.⁵⁵⁰

It becomes clear from these passages and explanations that the science of practice is the method which leads to the true knowledge of the content of the science of unveiling. The content of the science of unveiling may be known by people through the use of other sciences

⁵⁵⁰ Al-Ghazālī, *Jawāhir al-Qur’ān*, 72–73; *Jewels of the Qur’ān*, tr. Muhammad Abul Quasem, 25–27.

as well, but al-Ghazālī makes it clear that these other sciences do not provide true cognition.⁵⁵¹ The knowledge acquired through other sciences depends on the organs of the body, such as hearing with the ears of the body or seeing with the eyes of the body.⁵⁵² In order to acquire true cognition of these matters, one must see with the eyes of his true being, which is his soul. It is possible for the soul to achieve this level provided that one adheres in practice to the instructions given by him in *Revival*.

The characteristics of the Science of the Hereafter can be summarized in the following paragraphs:

The Science of the Hereafter is built on al-Ghazālī's opposition towards what he calls the worldly sciences. He also labels the practitioners of these sciences as the scholars of the world and asserts that their knowledge is beneficial only for this world but not for the eternal world. The knowledge which is beneficial for the eternal world can only be provided by the Science of the Hereafter, which had been practiced by the righteous forebear long ago and had been forgotten by his time. Moreover, the Science of the Hereafter brings happiness in this world as well, since its final destination, which is the science of unveiling, perfectly fulfills the requirements of man's true component, namely his soul. If a man reaches this level, he tastes the heavenly pleasures in this world.⁵⁵³

⁵⁵¹ For example, the attributes of God, which are part of the science of unveiling, are readily available in the books which are devoted to the sciences of lower grades, such as *kalām*. Anyone who can read them knows that God is alive, all-knowing, all-powerful, etc., but al-Ghazālī sees this kind of knowledge as worthy of ordinary people.

⁵⁵² Al-Ghazālī says in *Scale* that man is the combination of a body which sees with its eyes and a soul which comprehends with intellect and sees with insight (*baṣīrah*). The soul is something divine (*min al-umūr al-ilāhiyyah*) and loftier than the base material of this world. See *Mīzān al-'Amal*, 24.

⁵⁵³ Al-Ghazālī, *Mīzān al-'Amal*, 22.

The Science of the Hereafter suggests that man is composed of two distinct substances: the body and the soul.⁵⁵⁴ Like the sea-shell, man too has internal and external components. His internal component, which is his soul, is more important than the external one, since it is something divine and does not belong to this world. Man can acquire the true nature of things (*ḥaqā'iq al-ashyā'*) only with this part, since it is the locus of knowledge. Caring only for his body may cause man to forget his soul, and one who is not aware of his soul cannot be aware of God, since only its knowledge leads one to the knowledge of God,⁵⁵⁵ which is, again, the final destination of the Science of the Hereafter. In fact, al-Ghazālī constructs the Science of the Hereafter on this dual foundation. He uses the word external (*ẓāhir*) for body and dedicates the first two quarters of the *Revival* to it, which forms one part of the dual structure. Internal (*bāṭin*) is used for soul, and the last two quarters of the book are dedicated to it, which forms the other part of the structure. Al-Ghazālī always refers to the second part of the *Revival* when he talks about the cleaning of the soul from rust (*muhlikāt*) and polishing its mirror to better reflect reality (*munjiyāt*).⁵⁵⁶

The Science of the Hereafter comprises two parts: the science of practice, which is presented in the *Revival*, and the science of unveiling, which is written in some of his books and not presented to the public. Withholding its content from those who do not deserve it is an

⁵⁵⁴ According to Ayman Shihadeh, this dualism was a later development in Ash'arite theology introduced by several scholars, including al-Ghazālī. These scholars must have been mindful of the failings and limitations of the classical Ash'arite theory which had taken the soul as a subtle body inside the body (*jism laṭīf*). See Ayman Shihadeh, "Classical Ash'arī Anthropology: Body, Life, and Spirit," *Muslim World*, v. 102, n. 3-4, 2012, 475.

⁵⁵⁵ Al-Ghazālī, *Mīzān al-'Amal*, 25.

⁵⁵⁶ Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'*, v. 1, 13.

obligation for those who acquire it.⁵⁵⁷ This knowledge is the reward of happiness itself for those who make progress on the path of practice.

3. 6 The Path to the Hereafter in *Rasā'il*

The main features of al-Ghazālī's Science of the Hereafter were presented in the previous section. It was also mentioned that this science was considered to be al-Ghazālī's own invention.⁵⁵⁸ This consideration might be easily accepted as plausible, since al-Ghazālī seems to have been the first scholar to present its features and divisions in a systematical manner, as he himself states in the exordium of *Revival*. However, the same ideas which serve as the building blocks of this science are readily available in *Rasā'il*, and to such an extent that one is inclined to think of them as the possible source material of al-Ghazālī's science. In this section, I will try to substantiate this claim.

The most recurring theme in *Rasā'il* is that their authors always encourage the reader to purify his soul through knowledge ('ilm) and righteous behavior. In fact, they consider every epistle as a contribution to the purification of the soul and its ethical refinement.⁵⁵⁹ The purification of soul through knowledge leads one to the path to the hereafter (*ṭarīq al-ākhirah*).⁵⁶⁰ They also say that the description of the path to the hereafter and salvation in the life to come is the reason for the existence of all religions and sects which, according to them,

⁵⁵⁷ The fourth chapter will compare the content of this science with *Rasā'il*, showing that the construction of the Science of the Hereafter is based on ideas taken from *Rasā'il* and that the content of the science of unveiling owes much to *Rasā'il* as well.

⁵⁵⁸ Kenneth Garden, *First Islamic Reviver*, 63.

⁵⁵⁹ *Rasā'il*, v. 1, 75.

⁵⁶⁰ *Rasā'il*, v. 1, 78.

are medicines for the diseases of the soul.⁵⁶¹ They consider the objective of their scholarly efforts as identical with the objective of religion. This point appears more obviously with the allegory of a man who owns a beautiful garden and is generous in sharing its fruits with others.

In the catalogue of *Rasā'il*, the Ikhwān liken the man of knowledge who possess *Rasā'il* to a man with a beautiful garden. This man, because of his good nature, wishes to benefit other members of his kind with the fruits of his garden and invites those who are worthy of them to join him. But they do not respond to his invitation because of his presumptuous and haughty description of the garden. They see him as a dreamer with fancy visions, and scorn his insistence. The man realizes that the strategy he follows is not efficient and so changes it. In the new strategy, he brings some examples from the fruits of the garden, displays them and offers them to everybody who passes by the garden. After tasting the delicious fruits, they desire to taste not just a small amount but the whole garden. And then, when the owner realizes the sincerity of their desire, he lets them inside without any restriction.⁵⁶²

Rasā'il resemble the invitations of this man. Like this generous man, the possessor of *Rasā'il* must offer them to others, so that they too can attain eternal happiness. But the distribution of *Rasā'il* is qualified by the Ikhwān with some conditions. Like those who are sincere in their desire to enter the garden, they must be offered to those who are worthy, and prohibited to those who are unworthy. This is because the content of *Rasā'il* is like the great

⁵⁶¹ This information is taken from the catalogue of Buṭrus Bustānī's edition of *Rasā'il*, which was published in Beirut by Dār Ṣādir, see 38. The catalogue was written by the Ikhwān themselves, and in Tāmīr's edition it is incomplete. For the sake of consistency, I will otherwise continue to refer Tāmīr's edition.

⁵⁶² *Rasā'il*, v. 1, 75–76. In his footnote to this allegory, Tāmīr states that the garden is the symbol of heaven promised in the hereafter by God to his righteous servants.

theriac. Just like the theriac, they cause sickness if they do not cure; they lead to perdition if they do not lead to salvation, and they might kill if they do not revive. But the reason for this is not that their properties change from person to person, but because of the different conditions of their receivers. *Rasā'il* are similar to food and light. Food should not be given to a child who cannot eat it, since if it is given to him it causes him harm. Also, a person who stayed in darkness for a long time should not be exposed to the light for the reason that he might lose his sight completely. Like food and light, one must be exposed to *Rasā'il* gradually, one by one, as explained in the index, until one comprehends its content truly. The one who succeeds in this with God's grace continues to live forever in complete felicity.⁵⁶³

Reminiscent of al-Ghazālī and his Science of the Hereafter, the Ikhwān present their *Rasā'il* as a guide for gradual progress in the path to the hereafter. They state at the beginning of the seventh epistle⁵⁶⁴ that the ultimate objective of education in science is the improvement of the soul, its refinement, completion, and perfection. This practice will ensure its position in the hereafter. However, they immediately add an opposing notion into the composition and say that those who desire to stay in the world forever are unaware of the hereafter.⁵⁶⁵ They are

⁵⁶³ *Rasā'il*, v. 1, 76–77. This passage is reminiscent of al-Ghazālī's restricted works. *Rasā'il* thus share a common feature with al-Ghazālī's oeuvre, which is the condition of revealing their content gradually. Also, al-Ghazālī uses the same ideas expressed in this part in his *Munqidh* while defending his involvement with philosophy. The Ikhwān liken their *Rasā'il* to "the great theriac" (*al-tiryāq al-kabīr*), and al-Ghazālī likens himself to a skilled snake charmer who extracts the theriac for those who are in need of it. See *al-Munqidh*, 47; Watt, *Faith and Practice*, 43.

⁵⁶⁴ The title of the epistle is *fī al-ṣanā'i' al-'ilmiyyah wa-al-gharaḍ minhā* (on the scientific arts and their objectives). The Ikhwān give a classification of sciences in this epistle.

⁵⁶⁵ *Rasā'il*, v. 1, 253. This opposing dualist presentation is in agreement with their principle that the only thing which is truly unique in every aspect (*wāḥid bi-al-ḥaqīqah min jamī' al-wujūh*) is God, and the rest of existence

the ones who forget their origin and fall asleep with the sleep of ignorance even though they are very alert and awake in the material world. But, they are unaware of the truth. What the Ikhwān mean with their unawareness becomes clear in the following lines of the epistle when they talk about the human nature.

According to the Ikhwān, man is the aggregate of a physical body (*jasad jismānī*) and a spiritual soul (*naḥs rūḥānī*). Each component of this aggregation is an independent substance with different qualities and opposing conditions. They participate only in accidental actions and changing attributes. On the one hand, man desires this world and wishes to stay in it forever because of his physical body; on the other hand, he pursues the hereafter and longs to reach it because of his spiritual soul. Similar to these two opposing entities, man's conditions and actions almost always take the shape of a binary opposition such as life and death, sleep and wakefulness, knowledge and ignorance, remembrance and negligence, intelligence and stupidity, health and sickness, and so on. These conditions and actions belong solely to neither the body nor the soul, but rather to man's dual nature. As being a mortal, rational, living being (*huwa ḥayy nāṭiq mā'it*), man is rational and alive because of his soul, and mortal because of his body. For this reason as well, his sleep is caused by his body while his wakefulness is due to his soul.⁵⁶⁶

As for the special characteristics of each component,⁵⁶⁷ the body is a physical substance with physical dimensions that are perceived by physical senses. Being the combination of four humors⁵⁶⁸ which originate from four elements,⁵⁶⁹ the body has four

is dual in nature (*kull mā siwāh min jamī' al-mawjūdāt mathnawīyyah*). *Rasā'il* communicate their underlying message always from this dualist perspective. See *Rasā'il*, v. 1, 246.

⁵⁶⁶ *Rasā'il*, v. 1, 253–254.

⁵⁶⁷ Also see *Rasā'il*, v. 4, 7. This passage will be discussed again below.

⁵⁶⁸ These are blood, phlegm, black bile, and yellow bile (*al-dam wa-al-balgham wa-al-mirratān*).

qualities.⁵⁷⁰ It changes, decays, and becomes corrupt in time, and finally returns to the four elements again after death.⁵⁷¹ The soul, on the other hand, is a spiritual, celestial, luminous substance which is essentially alive, potentially knowledgeable, and naturally efficient (*ḥayyah bi-dhātihā, ‘allāmah bi-al-quwwah, fa’ālah bi-al-ṭab’*). It is capable of learning, and acts on the substances of the material world until it returns back to its origin either victorious with benefit and delight or regretful with sadness and depravation.⁵⁷²

After this exposition, the Ikhwān draw a connection between the information they give about human nature and verse 7:179 of the Qur’ān, which reads: “They have hearts with which they do not understand, they have eyes with which they do not see, and they have ears with which they do not hear. Those are like livestock; rather, they are more deviant. It is they who are the heedless.” According to the Ikhwān, these people are criticized by God not because they are ignorant about their conditions of living in the world, but because they are negligent and thoughtless about the hereafter. They support this point with verse 30:7, which

⁵⁶⁹ These are fire, air, water, and earth (*al-nār wa-al-hawā’ wa-al-mā’ wa-al-arḍ*).

⁵⁷⁰ These are warmth, cold, moistness, and dryness (*al-ḥarārah wa-al-burūdah wa-al-ruṭūbah wa-al-yabūсах*).

⁵⁷¹ *Rasā’il*, v. 1, 254.

⁵⁷² As seen above, al-Ghazālī’s opponents accused him of holding this opinion of the philosophers during the Nishapur controversy. See Al-Ghazālī, *Makātib-e Fārsi-ye Ghazālī be-nam Faḍā’il al-Anām min Rasā’il Ḥujjāt al-Islam*, ed. ‘Abbās Iqbāl (Tehran: Ketab-furūshi-ya Ibn Sīnā, 1333), 12. The Ikhwān understand verse 23:115 (“Did you think we created you for nothing and you would not return back to us?”) as proof for spiritual resurrection only. They deny the bodily resurrection in the afterlife. This is one of the three issues on which al-Ghazālī labels the philosophers as apostates. But his own position regarding this subject is a source of controversy. See, for example, Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge*, 9, 92.

says, “They know the externality of life in this world, but they are unaware of the hereafter.”⁵⁷³

Since human nature is the combination of two different substances, as also supported by the Qur’ān, the things man can acquire as property are two in nature as well: they can be either material properties for the benefit of his body, such as money and wealth, or spiritual properties for the benefit of his soul, such as religion and knowledge. While money and wealth become a tool for the pleasures of this world and fatten his body, religion and knowledge illuminate and heal his soul and become a guide in the path to the hereafter. For this reason as well, there are two kinds of session (*majlis*): a session of eating for the benefit of the mortal body, and a session of learning for the benefit of the immortal soul. And again, people are two kinds: those who seek the sessions of eating for the benefit of their bodies and those who seek the sessions of learning for the benefit of their souls.⁵⁷⁴ The latter try to comprehend religion truly and to improve the conditions of their souls in order to rescue them from the darkness of the material world. They do this because they look for the path to the hereafter that saves one from the world of generation and corruption and takes him to the celestial world, which is the abode of his eternal component.⁵⁷⁵

The Ikhwān define knowledge (*‘ilm*) as the existence of the form of a thing in the knower’s soul, while ignorance (*jahl*) is its opposite as the nonexistence of the form.⁵⁷⁶ In

⁵⁷³ *Rasā’il*, v. 1, 254–255; compare with al-Ghazālī, *Mīzān al-‘Amal*, 106.

⁵⁷⁴ Man’s place in the universe is in between the animals and the angels. Those who chase material gains get closer to the animals while those who strengthen their souls by abandoning blameworthy deeds and by studying true sciences get closer to the angels. *Rasā’il*, v. 2, 153–154; see also *Mīzān al-‘Amal*, 30–31.

⁵⁷⁵ *Rasā’il*, v. 1, 255–256; compare with al-Ghazālī, *Mīzān al-‘Amal*, 24–25.

⁵⁷⁶ “Al-‘ilm innamā huwa ṣūrat al-ma’lūm fī nafs al-‘ālim wa ḍidduh al-jahl wa huwa ‘adam tilka al-ṣūrah min al-nafs.” *Rasā’il*, v.1, 256.

order to keep the distinctive features of body and soul separate from each other, they oppose the notion that there exists a special place (*maḥall mukhtāṣṣ*) in the body for knowledge, such as the heart, and assert that this is the claim of those who do not have any knowledge about the true nature of the soul.⁵⁷⁷ They insist that the place of knowledge is in fact the immaterial soul.⁵⁷⁸

After making this connection between the salvation of the soul and knowledge, the Ikhwān present a classification of sciences as a guide for those who want to strengthen their soul.⁵⁷⁹ This is because the soul desires to acquire the various kinds of sciences just as the body craves for different kinds of food, smell, and spectacle.⁵⁸⁰ The Ikhwān urge the owner of *Rasā'il* to inform his friends and relatives about the content of their works. He should encourage them to acquire knowledge and renounce the world, and thus should guide them towards the path to the hereafter. According to them, this is the way which has been taken by the prophets, the righteous and virtuous scholars, and wise men of knowledge.⁵⁸¹

⁵⁷⁷ *Rasā'il*, v. 1, 258. This point is important in their understanding of the soul. Knowledge as the property of the soul does not cease to exist with the death of the body.

⁵⁷⁸ Al-Ghazālī states that “the locus of knowledge is the heart.” However, without doubt, he does not mean the bodily organ, but means the subtle entity which governs all bodily organs. See *Iḥyā'*, v. 3, 17. For what he means by this subtle entity, see *Iḥyā'*, v. 3, 4–6.

⁵⁷⁹ This is not the only classification of sciences they present in *Rasā'il*, but it seems to be the most comprehensive. See, for example, *Rasā'il*, v. 1, 81–82, 107–108.

⁵⁸⁰ *Rasā'il*, v. 1, 259.

⁵⁸¹ *Rasā'il*, v. 1, 266.

They divide the sciences into three main categories: 1) practical sciences,⁵⁸² 2) religious sciences,⁵⁸³ and 3) philosophical sciences.⁵⁸⁴ In fact, according to them, their epistles are planned based on this classification and every epistle is a contribution to a particular science mentioned here.⁵⁸⁵ The last part of their classification is the metaphysical sciences (*al-‘ulūm al-ilāhiyyāt*) which they consider as the ultimate goal of all knowledge and cognition,⁵⁸⁶ and in another epistle they describe it as the knowledge of the prophets.⁵⁸⁷ Their presentation of the metaphysical sciences is almost identical with al-Ghazālī’s science of unveiling. They divide them into five categories:

The first is the cognition of the Creator (*ma‘rifat al-bārī*), the Most Glorious and Generous, and the description of his uniqueness, and how he is the Cause of Existence, and the creator of creation, and the source of generosity, and the giver of existence, and the origin of virtue and goodness, and the protector of order, and the provider of permanence, and the regulator of all, and the knower of unseen and seen. Not absent from his sight is an atom’s weight within the earth and heavens, and the

⁵⁸² They call it *al-riyāḍiyyah*. It includes the sciences of worldly activities by virtue of which people make their living like occupational trades and crafts.

⁵⁸³ They call it *al-shar‘iyyah al-waḍ‘iyyah*. It includes the religious sciences such as knowledge of the Qur’ān, hadith, jurisprudence, and the science of exhortation.

⁵⁸⁴ They call it *al-falsafiyyah al-ḥaqīqiyyah*. It includes mathematical, logical, physical, and metaphysical sciences.

⁵⁸⁵ *Rasā’il*, v. 1, 108, 261, 266.

⁵⁸⁶ “*Al-‘ulūm al-ilāhiyyah alladhī huwa aqṣā’ gharaḍ al-ḥukamā’ wa-al-nihāyah allatī ilayhā yartaqī bi al-ma‘ārif al-ḥaqīqiyyah*,” *Rasā’il*, v. 1, 103; “*al-ilāhiyyāt wa huwa al-gharaḍ al-aqṣā’ wa-al-ghāyah al-quṣwā’*,” *Rasā’il*, v. 3, 333; “*al-ilāhiyyāt allatī hiya al-ghāyah al-quṣwā’ fī al-‘ulūm wa-al-ma‘ārif*,” *Rasā’il*, v. 3, 343.

⁵⁸⁷ *Rasā’il*, v. 2, 288. They repeat here that it is the ultimate aim of all sciences and brings man close to the level of angels.

ultimate beginning of all things, and the ultimate end of all things, and the capable master of all externals, and the competent knower of all internals...

The second is the knowledge of spiritual beings (*'ilm al-rūḥāniyyāt*), which is to say the cognition of the simple intelligible substances which are knowledgeable agents. They are the angels of God and his sincere servants. They are forms without materials which act on matter and give order to it. This [knowledge] is also the cognition of their connection to each other and how they emanate from one another. They are the spiritual spheres that surround the material spheres.

The third is psychology (*'ilm al-naḥsāniyyāt*). This is the cognition of souls and spirits which pervade the material spheres and the physical world beginning from the primum mobile to the utmost center of the Earth, and the cognition of how they rotate the spheres and set in motion the stars and how they cause growth in animals and plants, and how they descend on the bodies of animals and how they ascend from them after death.

The fourth is politics (*'ilm al-siyāsah*) and it has five divisions...⁵⁸⁸

The fifth is the knowledge of the final destination (*'ilm al-ma'ād*). This is the cognition of the true nature of the next creation (*al-nash'ah al-ukhrā'*) and how the souls will awaken after their long sleeps and be resurrected from the darkness of bodies, and how they will congregate on the day of resurrection and rise on the straight path to be reckoned on the day of religion. And this is the cognition of the true nature of the reward of those who are righteous and the punishment of those who are evil.⁵⁸⁹

⁵⁸⁸ Translating this part seems unnecessary since al-Ghazālī does not say anything about politics in the science of unveiling.

⁵⁸⁹ *Rasā'il*, v. 1, 264–265. The description of the metaphysical science given here is similar to the ten foundations on which, according to the Ikhwān, the originator of religion must rely at the time of originating his

The subject matter of each classification is clear and can be identified as follows. The first part deals with 1) God and his attributes, the second part deals with 2) the basic structure of the universe which is known as cosmology,⁵⁹⁰ the third part deals with 3) psychology, and the fourth part deals with 4) eschatology.⁵⁹¹

Even though this is the most comprehensive account of the content of metaphysical science, it is not only the discussion of the subject the Ikhwān provide. *Rasā'il* are replete with discussions of metaphysical science. But, similar to al-Ghazālī's discussion of the subject, one of the discussions exemplifies the soul's importance as the most important tool in the acquisition of metaphysical science and hence deserves to be quoted.

religion. This means that they view the metaphysical sciences as the same as the theological sciences. See *Rasā'il*, v. 4, 113–114.

⁵⁹⁰ This might not be clear at first sight. But the Ikhwān consider the universe as a hierarchical structure emanating from more spiritual to less spiritual. They consider the celestial spheres as the abode of spiritual beings. The decrease of spirituality is the cause for the existence of matter in the sublunar world. But there is still some influence of spirituality in this world which is the cause of its existence and order. Their expression "They are forms without materials which act on matter and give order to it" supports my point that this part is a description of their cosmology. For the structure of the universe, see *Rasā'il*, v. 1, 138. For an illustration of my point, see epistle twenty, entitled *fī māhiyyat al-ṭabī'ah* (on the quiddity of nature), v. 2, 121–136. In this epistle, they say that the philosophers call angels the spirits of the celestial spheres.

⁵⁹¹ According to Carmela Baffioni, the metaphysics of the Ikhwān comprises 1) the knowledge of God and His attributes, 2) the knowledge of the soul, and 3) the knowledge of resurrection and of closeness to God. See her "From Sense Perception to the Vision of God: A Path Towards Knowledge According to the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*, v. 8 (1998), 216. This is because she bases her discussion on *Rasā'il*, v. 3, 247–248.

The intention of the wise philosophers with the study of the practical sciences is through them to reach the physical sciences. Their intention with the study of the physical sciences is to reach the metaphysical sciences, which is their ultimate aim and the utmost of point of accession before the true cognitions (*al-ma'ārif al-ḥaqīqiyyah*). But the first degree of study in the metaphysical sciences is the cognition of the essence of soul, the search for its origin and where it was before its attachment to the body, the inquiry of its return after its leaving the body, which is called death, and the nature of the rewards of the virtuous in the spiritual world and the punishment of the evil in the abode of the hereafter. And another feature is also that since man gravitates towards the cognition of his Lord, there is no path for him to His cognition except through the cognition of his own soul.⁵⁹²

The Ikhwān's classification of the sciences in a hierarchical manner and the soul's ascension in the hierarchy is reminiscent of al-Ghazālī. What is more, the highest degree set at the top as the ultimate aim is almost identical in the Ikhwān and *Rasā'il*. Alexander Treiger's evaluation of al-Ghazālī's science of unveiling supports this position. According to Treiger, al-Ghazālī's science of unveiling is primarily a theological discipline revealed to prophets and saints through illumination. He identifies the areas it covers as four in number: 1) God, 2) cosmology, 3) prophetology, angelology, and religious psychology, and 4) eschatology.⁵⁹³ As seen above, the Ikhwān's presentation of the metaphysical sciences comprises these four areas in a hierarchical structure as well.

Beyond these similarities, there are other discussions in *Rasā'il* which resemble al-Ghazālī's discussion of the Science of the Hereafter. In order to illustrate the superiority of his science over other religious sciences, al-Ghazālī uses the example of the sea-shell in *The*

⁵⁹² *Rasā'il*, v. 1, 103.

⁵⁹³ Treiger, "al-Ghazālī's Classifications of the Sciences," 8.

Jewels of the Qur'ān. He likens the religious sciences of his time to the shell, while his science represents the pearl inside (*lubb*). This is the science of the elect and those who are firmly grounded in the sciences.⁵⁹⁴ A similar discussion takes place in *Rasā'il* when the Ikhwān talk about the grades of religious sciences.

According to the Ikhwān, everything that exists in this world has an external side and an internal side. The external is like the shell and bone while the internal is like the kernel (*lubb*) and essence of a thing. This principle applies to the religious sciences as well. They comprise both the external regulations and ordinances which are readily known by the legal scholars and by the men of knowledge either elect or ordinary, and the mysterious internal regulations and ordinances which are not known by anyone except by the elect and those who are firmly grounded in the sciences.⁵⁹⁵

The reason for this dual character of the religious sciences is that religion is established both for the benefit of this world and the world to come. Like the shell and the pith, these two worlds are different from each other in essence and attribute, and there are people suitable for each world as well. The different nature of the religious sciences is the result of taking the different natures of people into consideration.⁵⁹⁶ But establishing the religious sciences both for the people of this world and the people of the hereafter does not mean that both groups are going to be saved in the world to come, even though they observe the religious commands and prohibitions equally.⁵⁹⁷ It seems that for the Ikhwān, achieving

⁵⁹⁴ Al-Ghazālī, *Jawāhir al-Qur'ān*, 78.

⁵⁹⁵ *Rasā'il*, v. 1, 311.

⁵⁹⁶ *Rasā'il*, v. 1, 311.

⁵⁹⁷ *Rasā'il*, v. 3, 236. They consider those who accept these truths by imitation (*taqlīd*) without certainty (*yaqīn*) and mental perception (*baṣīrah*) as veiled (*maḥjūb*), and classify them with Satan and his followers. Identical with al-Ghazālī, they are veiled because of their ignorance. See al-Ghazālī, *Jawāhir al-Qur'ān*, 84.

salvation is not possible without the acquisition of the internal side of these sciences.⁵⁹⁸ And this is the knowledge of the true nature of the hereafter which, according to them, is the kernel of the kernels.⁵⁹⁹

Up to this point, this section has worked to establish the similarity between the science of unveiling and *Rasā'il*. However, al-Ghazālī's Science of the Hereafter has another subdivision, which is the science of practice. In the passage quoted from *The Jewels of the Qur'ān* in the previous section, al-Ghazālī elaborates the principle notions of this science. What he says in that passage is almost identical with the passage below, taken from the epistle forty third of the Ikhwān.⁶⁰⁰ They say:

Oh brothers! Know that God Almighty created the creation, straightened it, planned its happenings and set everything in motion. He then sat down on His Throne and elevated it. But, out of his infinite grace, He chose a few of His servants and permitted them to draw near to Him, and He revealed some of His hidden secrets to them. They were then sent to summon all men to repent and to disclose to the rest of Mankind some of those mysteries, so that they might awaken from their slumber of ignorance and live the life of the wise and blessed, and reach the perfection of Paradise and eternal life...

And know, oh brothers, that there are only two ways to get there: the purity of soul (*ṣafā' al-nafs*) and the straightforwardness of the path (*istiqāmat al-ṭarīqah*). Now

⁵⁹⁸ *Rasā'il*, v. 1, 311–313.

⁵⁹⁹ *Rasā'il*, v. 3, 246 and 248. The Ikhwān say that they are the possessors of this knowledge and one who wants to acquire its content must ask them and consult their work.

⁶⁰⁰ Al-Ghazālī uses the expression "*al-safar ilā Allāh* (the journey towards God)" in order summarize his description of this science. The title of epistle forty three is "*fī māhiyyah al-ṭarīq ilā Allāh* (on the quiddity of the path towards God)."

then, one is the purity of soul because that soul is the essential substance of human nature. Man is the name of the thing which consists of a body and a soul. Body is visible and consists of flesh, blood, bones, veins, sinews, skin and the like. All of these substances are the materials of earth; they are dark and heavy, and subject to change and decay.

However, soul is a heavenly substance; it is spiritual, alive, luminous, and light. It animates the body and is not subject to change. It is endowed with intelligence and perceives the forms of the things. Its likeness in grasping the perceptible and the intelligible existence is that of a mirror. If the mirror is symmetrical and clean of surface, it reflects the forms of material objects proper to their true nature. But if the mirror is twisted, it reflects the forms of material objects inappropriate to their true nature. And also, if the surface of the mirror is covered by rust, definitely it does not reflect anything.

So is the situation of soul as well. If it is knowledgeable not suffocated by ignorance, and clear of substance not contaminated by bad deeds, and pure of essence not rusted by destructive behaviors, and if it is well-disposed not twisted by heretical views, then it reflects the true nature of the spiritual things which are indeed part its own abode, and grasps them by their true nature. And it witnesses the invisible matters (*al-umūr al-ghā'ibah*) from its senses with its intelligence and the purity of its essence just like its witnessing of the material objects with its senses given that its senses are healthy and good. But, on the other hand, if it is ignorant, impure of essence, contaminated by evil actions and destructive behaviors, twisted by heretical views, and persistent in this situation, then it is veiled from grasping the true nature of spiritual beings, and unable to reach to the presence of God, and is left behind by the felicity of the hereafter.⁶⁰¹

⁶⁰¹ *Rasā'il*, v. 4, 7–8; *The Epistles of the Sincere Brethren: An Annotated Translation of Epistles 43–47*, trans. Eric van Reijn (Onhunga: The Artful Publishing Company, 1988), 1–3.

This passage includes most of the major themes of *Rasā'il* and illustrates the redemptive nature of the philosophy of the Ikhwān clearly. The language and the notions used in it are almost identical to the language al-Ghazālī uses when he describes the science of practice. Like the Ikhwān, al-Ghazālī considers the cognition of God and the hereafter as the highest point of knowledge, and believes that in order to reach it, one must have the knowledge of the straight path, which is the knowledge of the purification of soul and removal of the destructive qualities. If one is successful in this practice, then the true natures of these things are revealed to his soul, and this state, according to the Ikhwān and al-Ghazālī, is the attainment of the highest level. To illustrate his point, al-Ghazālī repeats the analogy of the mirror in several of his works,⁶⁰² and it is central in the discourse of the Ikhwān as well.⁶⁰³

The passage also includes the basic division of al-Ghazālī's science of practice. As seen before, the science of practice as given in *Revival* consists of two grades, one for the exterior of man which is his body and the other for his interior which is his soul. The grade for the interior consists of two grades as well. The first, which al-Ghazālī calls *muhlikāt*, is the cleaning of the soul from bad deeds and destructive behaviors. The second, which al-Ghazālī calls *munjiyāt*, is the polishing and straightening of the interior with good deeds and saving qualities.

The Ikhwān do not enjoin only intellectual efforts in their encouragements for the purification of the soul. Religious practice too is an important part in the prescription. They call the second way “the straightforwardness of the path (*istiqāmat al-ṭarīq*)”⁶⁰⁴ and mean by

⁶⁰² Ghazālī, *Mīzān al-'Amal*, 35; *Ihyā'*, v. 3, 17; *al-Maqṣad al-Asnā' fī Sharḥ Asmā' Allāh al-Ḥusnā*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah), 8; *al-Mustaṣfā' min 'Ilm al-Uṣūl* (Beirut: Dār Ihyā' al-Turāth), 26–27.

⁶⁰³ *Rasā'il*, v. 2, 316; v. 4, 7, 8, 86, 340.

⁶⁰⁴ They use both *ṭarīq* and *ṭarīqah*. See *Rasā'il*, v. 4, 7 and 9.

it the shortcut given by the prophets, which is religion.⁶⁰⁵ In another place where they elaborate the saving qualities of true believers, they repeat the gist of this passage and recommend those who desire to receive the inspiration of angels (*ilhām*) to eliminate the evil traits their characters have acquired since early childhood and to follow a straight path (*sāra šīraṭan ‘ādilatan*) as described by religion.⁶⁰⁶ Like the strategy of al-Ghazālī, then, the strategy of the Ikhwān requires religious practice as well.⁶⁰⁷

As for the representatives of this path, the discussion of the Ikhwān overlaps with the discussion of al-Ghazālī as well. Like al-Ghazālī, the Ikhwān regard the scholars who know the true nature of the hereafter as the heirs of the prophets.⁶⁰⁸ What they inherited from the prophets was not the material of the world, such as gold and silver money,⁶⁰⁹ but rather knowledge, faith, and piety. Like the prophets, they too receive celestial support and inspiration, and live an ascetic life by renouncing the world and desiring to reach to the hereafter. They chose hardship over comfort in this world and disagree with the desires of

⁶⁰⁵ *Rasā’il*, v. 4, 10.

⁶⁰⁶ *Rasā’il*, v. 4, 103; 116. See also *Rasā’il*, v. 2, 154.

⁶⁰⁷ Al-Ghazālī states in the exordium of *Revival* that others as well have written books on some of the topics he deals with in his book. He claims at the same time that his book is the most concise and methodical. *Iḥyā’*, v. 1, 12. His meaning becomes more clear when one compares the content of the epistles, especially epistle 9, entitled *fī bayān al-akhlāq wa asbāb ikhtilāfihā wa anwā’i ‘ilālihā wa nukat min ādāb al-anbiyā’ wa zubad min akhlāq al-ḥukamā’* (on the explanation of moral characters and their differences and the reasons for the differences and the anecdotes from the good manners of prophets and the extracts from the morals of wise) v. 1, 285–355; and epistle forty six, entitled *fī māhiyyat al-imān wa khiṣāl al-mu’minīn al-muḥaqqiqīn* (on the quiddity of faith and the special characteristics of true believers) v. 4, 57–106, with the second part of his book which is dedicated to the destructive qualities (*muhlikāt*) and the saving qualities (*munjiyāt*).

⁶⁰⁸ *Rasā’il*, v. 1, 345; v. 3, 287, 317.

⁶⁰⁹ *Rasā’il*, v. 4, 59.

their passions.⁶¹⁰ They are those who are closest to God because of their imitation of His attributes.⁶¹¹ Because of these characteristics, the Ikhwān consider them to be the true guides in the path to the hereafter,⁶¹² an implication which again reminds one of al-Ghazālī.

3.7 Conclusion

After leaving his luxurious and glittering life in Baghdad under dubious circumstances, al-Ghazālī returns back to public life with his most important book, *The Revival of the Religious Sciences*. He promotes with the publication of this book a new method for the attainment of felicity, which he calls the Science of the Hereafter. He divides this science into two parts, the science of practice and the science of unveiling, and devotes the *Revival* to the first part of this division. If followed properly, the first part leads one to the second part, a science that reveals the ultimate truth about God, the universe, and man's destiny in this world and the world to come. For this reason, the second part is not intended for public distribution and can only be shared by those who are worthy of it. Achieving the content of this science is a sign of achieving of salvation. Naturally, as the originator of this science, al-Ghazālī represents himself as the authorized distributor of the method, which is the science of practice, and the final content, which is the science of unveiling, of the Science of the Hereafter.

Al-Ghazālī builds this new science of the hereafter on the dichotomy of this world and the hereafter. He constantly reminds his reader that life in this world goes fast and comes to an end after only a short time. However, according to al-Ghazālī, this does not mean that life itself comes to an end with the death of body. In fact, true component of man, which is the

⁶¹⁰ *Rasā'il*, v. 1, 347.

⁶¹¹ *Rasā'il*, v. 4, 75. The Ikhwān qualify them with the word *muta'allih* (divine and heavenly).

⁶¹² *Rasā'il*, v. 3, 248.

soul, goes on to live forever, either happily in reward or sadly in punishment depending on the investments man makes during his life in this world. If he runs after the investments of this world and neglects the needs of his soul like the majority of men, then, inevitably, he will end up sad in the hereafter and be one of those who lose eternal happiness.

Al-Ghazālī thinks that investing in this world for the needs of body and neglecting the hereafter and the needs of soul is foolishness. The true way for al-Ghazālī is the other way around; that is, one should invest in the hereafter and the soul. And the investment in the soul can only be made by acquiring knowledge and by practicing moral behavior. In order to convey his meaning more clearly, al-Ghazālī employs the analogy of a mirror. According to this analogy, the soul in its relation to knowledge is like a mirror in its relation to forms. If the mirror is clean and not twisted, then it reflects the forms proper to their true nature. So is the condition of soul. Only by being pure and not twisted can the soul acquire the true nature of things regarding God, the universe, and human destiny. This, in fact, is the true meaning of salvation.

While this science can be considered as an invention of al-Ghazālī, it obviously shares its principal notions and ideas with the philosophy of Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'. Like al-Ghazālī, the Ikhwān also present their work, *Rasā'il*, as a guide in the path to the hereafter. According to them as well, the soul is the essential component of man, and one which dwells in a body for only a short time during its stay in this world. Its wellbeing in the afterlife depends on the choices man makes in this world. If man prefers the needs of his body and neglects his soul, then the soul returns back to its origin in pain and sadness after the death of his body. Like al-Ghazālī, the Ikhwān also assert that providing for the needs of his soul must be the priority of man.

Similar to al-Ghazālī, the Ikhwān too claims that man can provide for the needs of his soul only by knowledge and practice. And like al-Ghazālī again, they liken the soul to a mirror in its relation to knowledge. Knowledge, as the food of soul, strengthens it; and practice, by clearing the obstacles before it, opens the best way for the acquisition of knowledge. And gradually, man reaches knowledge of God, the universe, and his destiny, which means, in fact, salvation itself. So then, it is possible to conclude that *Rasā'il* promoted al-Ghazālī's Science of the Hereafter long before al-Ghazālī himself did, and this makes one think that al-Ghazālī owes much to them. Comparing the content of al-Ghazālī's highest science, the science of unveiling, with *Rasā'il* in the next chapter will disclose the extent of his debt to the Ikhwān.

CHAPTER IV

THE SCIENCE OF UNVEILING IN COMPARISON WITH *RASĀ'IL*: THE CASE OF *MISHKĀT*

4. 1 Introduction

As seen in the previous chapter, al-Ghazālī's Science of the Hereafter consists of two subdivisions: the science of practice and the science of unveiling. It has been seen as well that these two sciences are not to be considered as independent disciplines from each other, since al-Ghazālī describes the former as an ongoing practical process implemented in pursuit of the latter. Only after the practice is followed properly can one achieve the content of the science of unveiling, and its achievement indicates the achievement of eternal felicity.

The true nature of the science of unveiling, however, is still a matter of controversy among scholars.⁶¹³ Richard Frank states that al-Ghazālī means by the science of unveiling a science which gives “true insight into the essential natures of things and the universe and into God's being as creator of every contingent entity and event, i.e., true *tawhīd*.”⁶¹⁴ This statement might not seem problematic to many scholars. However, objections arise when Frank asserts that the method proposed by al-Ghazālī for the attainment of this knowledge is demonstrative in nature and identical with what Ibn Sīnā and other philosophers call “demonstrative reasoning.” According to Frank, the science of unveiling, which he also calls al-Ghazālī's higher theology, is based on Aristotelian logic and the epistemology of Ibn Sīnā;

⁶¹³ Alexander Treiger, “Al-Ghazālī's Classifications of the Sciences and Description of the Highest Theoretical Science,” *Dîvân Disiplinler Arası Çalışmalar Dergisi* 16, no. 30 (2011/1), 28–31.

⁶¹⁴ Richard Frank, *Al-Ghazālī and the Ash'arite School* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1994), 22

it is also only appropriate for the intellectual elite, in contrast to the dialectical reasoning of theology (*kalām*) which is based on the Qur'ān and followed by simple people.⁶¹⁵

Another scholar, Ahmad Dallal, on the other hand, firmly opposes the position taken by Frank. Dallal argues that Frank bases his interpretation of the science of unveiling on partially quoted texts of al-Ghazālī's works. According to Dallal, while al-Ghazālī presents the science of unveiling as the ultimate science, it is still questionable whether he is referring to a higher theology based on demonstration instead of a simple mysticism or Sufism. Dallal asserts that textual evidence clearly illustrates that the science of unveiling is achieved after the purification of the soul by following the examples of the prophets. The prophets attain certain knowledge, which is also guaranteed by this science, not by the systematic application of logic but by intuitive knowledge and with the aid of revelation. Unlike the process of logical reasoning, this science is not written in books. This is because it is practical and depends on worship, self-discipline, and supplication. Thus, for Dallal, knowledge acquired through the practice of the science of unveiling is the spiritual mystical knowledge of the Sufis.⁶¹⁶

Alexander Treiger offers a synthesis of these two opposing positions by bringing a new approach to the debate. According to Treiger, the best way to assess the power of the arguments presented in this debate is to take the four aspects of the science of unveiling into consideration. The four aspects are: 1) the designation of this science with the word *mukāshafah*, 2) its method of acquisition, 3) the theoretical analysis of its method of acquisition, and 4) its content. Treiger asserts that Dallal's argumentation focuses on the first two aspects and its power is limited to them only. According to him, Dallal is correct in

⁶¹⁵ Frank, *Al-Ghazālī and the Ash'arite School*, 21.

⁶¹⁶ Ahmad Dallal, "Al-Ghazālī and the Perils of Interpretation," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 122, no. 4 (October-December, 2002), 779.

rejecting Frank's interpretation of this science as a demonstrative science by focusing on its method of acquisition. However, he is wrong when he claims first that this science is not a theoretical but a practical science which leads one to the mystical knowledge of the Sufis, and second that it is not written in books. Treiger states that al-Ghazālī himself considers this science a theoretical science and has recorded its content in several of his works including *The Revival of the Religious Sciences*.⁶¹⁷

When it comes to the third and fourth aspects, Treiger claims that the theoretical foundation of this science may be understood and interpreted philosophically, and that its content is possibly inspired by philosophy. Reminiscent of Frank, Treiger concludes that the science of unveiling is a kind of Avicennian-based esoteric theology which is revealed to select non-prophets who are endowed with prophetic powers.⁶¹⁸ Its acquisition requires both philosophical training and meticulous religious and ethical preparation. According to Treiger, what makes al-Ghazālī the key figure in the transition from practical Sufism to theosophical Sufism are these features of the science of unveiling.⁶¹⁹

It seems that the discussion about the nature of this science turns around the influence of philosophy in its content. While Frank thinks that the content is derived mostly from the philosophy of Ibn Sīnā, Dallal thinks it is based on Sufism. And for Treiger, it is a genuine mixture of Sufism and the philosophy of Ibn Sīnā. Treiger's position, in fact, seems to be the most satisfying position among them.

⁶¹⁷ Treiger, "Al-Ghazālī's Classifications of the Sciences," 29.

⁶¹⁸ While Ibn Sīnā is still central in Treiger's argument, he acknowledges that this science may have other sources as well such as *Rasā'il*. See Treiger, "Al-Ghazālī's Classifications of the Sciences," 31.

⁶¹⁹ Treiger, "Al-Ghazālī's Classifications of the Sciences," 30–31.

This chapter aims to take this debate in another direction by comparing the content of the science of unveiling with *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*, giving particular attention to al-Ghazālī's *Niche of Lights*.⁶²⁰ This comparison might be helpful in removing the modern perplexity regarding the source of al-Ghazālī's science of unveiling. It will be seen from this comparison that what the Ikhwān reveal about the content of their highest science in their *Rasā'il* finds its way into al-Ghazālī's *Niche of Lights*, which is one of his restricted works.⁶²¹

4. 2 From the Meanings of Light to God as the Only True Existent

Both al-Ghazālī and the Ikhwān consider the cognition of God as the highest point that human beings can achieve intellectually in this world. Their systems as spiritual trainings are built to guide them towards its achievement. This is because the cognition of God is a requirement for humans in this world in exchange for the achievement of felicity in the afterlife.

Both al-Ghazālī and the Ikhwān, however, seem to be reluctant to reveal any information regarding God and his attributes. They repeat the saying “revealing the secret of

⁶²⁰ As pointed out by Treiger, the content of the science of unveiling was recorded in books by al-Ghazālī. According to him, al-Ghazālī gives the titles of these books when he names the books that he devoted to the highest rank of the sciences, which is naturally the science of unveiling. Treiger classifies these books as “esoteric works on the science of God and the Last Day.” They include, but are not limited to, *Mīzān*, *Arba'īn*, *Jawāhir*, *Mishkāṭ*, and some sections of the *Revival*. See his “Al-Ghazālī's Classifications of the Sciences,” 24–28.

⁶²¹ According to Afifi al-Akiti, the expression “restricted works” does not apply only to *al-Madnūn bih 'alā ghayr ahlih*, but to more than one text. See his “The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly of *Falsafa*: al-Ghazālī's *Madnūn*, *Tahāfut*, and *Maqāsid*, with Particular Attention to their *Falsafī* Treatments of God's Knowledge of Temporal Events,” in *Avicenna and His Legacy: A Golden Age of Science and Philosophy*, ed. Y. T. Langermann (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), 52. Al-Akiti's observation here parallels that of Treiger.

Lordship is unbelief” in several places of their works.⁶²² Nevertheless, they do not refrain from talking about the subject. While al-Ghazālī devotes the *Niche of Lights* to this subject, the Ikhwān spread its treatment across several epistles.⁶²³

Al-Ghazālī composed the *Niche of Lights* as a response to an inquiry about the mysteries of the Divine Lights as expressed in the famous Light-Verse of the Qur’ān⁶²⁴ and a certain tradition.⁶²⁵ According to him, one must know the various meanings of the word “light” (*nūr*) in order to understand what is meant with the verse and the tradition in question.

⁶²² “*Ifshā’ sirr al-rubūbiyah kufr.*” *Rasā’il*, v. 2, 266 and v. 3, 99; *Iḥyā’* v. 1, 137 and v. 4, 306; *Mishkāt al-Anwār wa Miṣfāt al-Asrār*, ed. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ‘Izz al-Dīn al-Sayrawān (Beirut: ‘Alam al-Kutub, 1986), 117. Al-Ghazālī always attributes this saying to one of the cognizant (*ba’d al-‘ārifīn*). Al-Sayrawān traces its origin back to Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī who died in 996. His work *Qūt al-Qulūb* seems to have been written later than *Rasā’il*. For its date of publication, see Bilal Saklan, “Kutū’l-Kulūb,” *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi*, Istanbul, 2002, v. 26, 501.

⁶²³ According to Hermann Landolt, al-Ghazālī uses the forty-second epistle of the Ikhwān as his source while composing *Niche*, especially for the composition of its third section. See his “Ghazālī and ‘Religionswissenschaft’: Some Notes on the *Mishkāt al-Anwār*,” *Asiatische Studien: Zeitschrift der Schweizerischen Asien-Gesellschaft*, 45 (1991), 23. Landolt also argues against Watt that not only the third section of the *Niche* but all its three sections are Neoplatonic and hence incompatible with what Watt thinks of as orthodox, and the source of this Neoplatonism again is the forty-second epistle of the Ikhwān. For details, see 23–31. I am in complete agreement with the findings of Landolt, and this chapter can be considered as a substantiation of his argument.

⁶²⁴ The verse is “God is the Light of the Heavens and the Earth. The similitude of His Light is as it were a Niche (*Mishkāt*) wherein is a Lamp (*Miṣbāḥ*), the Lamp within a Glass (*Zujājah*), the Glass as it were a pearly Star. From a Tree right blessed is it lit, an Olive-tree neither of the East nor of the West, the Oil whereof were well-nigh luminous though Fire (*Nār*) touched it not. Light upon Light!” Surah 24, verse 35.

⁶²⁵ The tradition is “God has Seventy Thousand Veils of Light and Darkness. Were He to withdraw their curtain, then would the splendours of His Aspect surely consume everyone who apprehended Him with his sight.”

The word has a threefold signification which reflects the various grades of light: the first for the commoner (‘*awāmm*), the second for the elect (*khawāṣṣ*), and the third for the elect of the elect (*khawāṣṣ al-khawāṣṣ*).⁶²⁶

The meaning of the word as used by the commoner is connected to the physical appearances of the phenomenal world. These appearances are perceived by the senses, especially with the sense of seeing (*baṣar*). This signification reflects the relativity inherent in its usage, since a certain appearance might appear to one person and be concealed from another depending on the conditions of the senses of the perceiver. In this grade, things in relation to the senses fall under three categories: 1) the dark bodies which are not visible even to themselves, 2) the bright objects which are visible by themselves such as the stars and the ember, and 3) the luminous objects which are visible by themselves and make others visible as well such as the Sun and the burning fire. According to al-Ghazālī, the third is the meaning of light for the commoner and this is the first signification of the word.⁶²⁷

The meaning of the word is connected more to the perceiver in the understanding of the elect. This is because the essence of light is more to be perceived than to be visible and make other objects visible. The existence of light would not mean much without the existence of a perceiver. The physical light cannot perceive itself, and the perception of the agent does not take place through it. The perception depends on the existence of a special organ, and this organ is the eye. The case of the blind exemplifies this point. In order to convey his point more strongly, al-Ghazālī uses various expressions of everyday language such as “the light of the eye” and “the light of the vision.” Thus, according to him, the faculty of perception,

⁶²⁶ Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāṭ*, 119; *Niche*, 45.

⁶²⁷ Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāṭ*, 120; *Niche*, 46.

especially sight, is a more suitable for the term light than physical light itself, and this is the second signification of the word and is more proper for the elect.⁶²⁸

The light of physical sight, however, is deficient with several kinds of flaws. It sees others but cannot see itself. It cannot see things that are very distant, very near, or behind veils. It sees the exterior not the interior, the part not the whole, and the finite not the infinite. To it, what is large appears to be small, what is far appears to be near, what is at rest appears to be in motion, and vice versa.⁶²⁹ Taking these flaws into consideration, al-Ghazālī says that if there is an eye free from these flaws it better deserves to be given the name of light. And, in fact, there is an eye of this kind in the heart of man, which is called by various names such as intelligence, spirit, or human soul. Al-Ghazālī urges his reader not to get caught by these various names and explains what he means with it by saying that it is the faculty of man by which he is distinguished from the infant, from the animals, and from the mad. For convenience though, he says, he prefers to use the word “intelligence” (*‘aql*) for it.⁶³⁰

Al-Ghazālī lists the advantage of intelligence against the defects of physical sight. Intelligence perceives itself as well as others; the objects near and far are no exception to its power; it can perceive things which are behind veils; it can apprehend the interior reality of things and their essential spirits; its domain is not only that of partial appearances but also the entirety of existence; it has the potential to apprehend what is infinite; and it can correct the mistakes caused by the limited power of sense perception. For these reasons, intelligence

⁶²⁸ Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāṭ*, 120–121; *Niche*, 46–47.

⁶²⁹ Compare the flaws al-Ghazālī gives with *Rasā’il*, v. 3, 340.

⁶³⁰ Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāṭ*, 121–122; *Niche*, 47.

deserves more to be called light than the physical eye which, in fact, is darkness in relation to intelligence.⁶³¹

Al-Ghazālī, however, does not say in the discussion on intelligence that it is the third signification of the word, thus for the elect of the elect. Instead, he continues to argue that there is another light beyond intelligence. According to him, intelligence with its own light does not perceive everything equally on the same level. On one hand, knowledge of some propositions is already given to it, which he calls the necessary truths (*ḍarūriyyāt*), such as the propositions that the same thing cannot be both created and eternal, or existent and nonexistent at the same time; and the same proposition cannot be both true and false at the same time. But on the other hand, intelligence needs to be encouraged and pushed forward for the apprehension of other propositions, which he calls the theoretical truths (*naẓariyyāt*). The encouragement is done best by the word of wisdom (*kalām al-ḥikmah*). The potentiality of intelligence turns into actuality with the light of wisdom. And al-Ghazālī asserts that the most valuable wisdom is the word of God, especially the Qur’ān. For this reason, the Qur’ān deserves more than all else to be called light. In fact, the Qur’ān consummates the sight of intelligence just as the Sun consummates the sight of eye.⁶³²

Al-Ghazālī’s purpose in introducing wisdom, and especially the Qur’ān, into the discussion as a higher level of light is to make way for the argument that beyond the physical world there is another level of existence, and that it is there where the light of wisdom originates. This level is called the world of dominion (*‘ālam al-malakūt*). According to al-Ghazālī, the reader must understand at this point that just as there is an eye for the physical

⁶³¹ Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāṭ*, 123–127; *Niche*, 47–51.

⁶³² Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāṭ*, 128–130; *Niche*, 52–53.

world, there is an eye for the world of dominion as well.⁶³³ What he means by the eye for the world of dominion is the sight of intelligence, which he later calls insight (*baṣīrah*).⁶³⁴

It should be remembered that al-Ghazālī uses the word “intelligence” (*‘aql*) interchangeably with the word “soul” (*rūḥ* or *naḥs*), as he mentioned earlier in the book. This fact establishes the connection between insight and the soul in his system. When he talks about the sight of intelligence he says that it is from the world of dominion, as opposed to the physical eye which is from the world of manifestation (*‘ālam al-shahādah*). For him, the comprehension of this dual existence is the opening of the first door towards the comprehension of the world of dominion.⁶³⁵

According to al-Ghazālī, the dual nature of man makes him stay in the middle of existence between the world of dominion which is higher, spiritual, and luminous, and the world of manifestation which is lower, physical, and dark. But the present condition of man is that he is thrown into the world of manifestation. Insight, which is the sight of the soul, is the vehicle that takes him towards the higher world. If man does not try to ascend towards the higher by using it, then he stays in the abyss of the lower without actualizing his true essence.⁶³⁶ This condition makes him similar to the other animals. Beyond that, man is worse than the other animals if he does not use it. This is because, unlike him, they are not given intelligence, or hence the opportunity, to ascend towards the higher world.⁶³⁷

⁶³³ Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt*, 130; *Niche*, 53.

⁶³⁴ Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt*, 142; *Niche*, 62.

⁶³⁵ Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt*, 130; *Niche*, 53.

⁶³⁶ *Maḥrūm ‘an khāṣṣiyyat al-insāniyyah*. Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt*, 131.

⁶³⁷ Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt*, 131; *Niche*, 53. Being higher or lower does not mean one is above the other physically. But higher is above lower because it is beyond the perception of the physical senses, and falls in the domain of perception of insight.

The ascension to the world of dominion means the attainment of the uttermost knowledge about existence. The case of the prophets exemplifies this condition. When they reach the world of dominion, they have access to the keys of the unseen. They are now in a place from where the causes of existing things descend into the world of manifestation. They realize in this place that the relation between the world of dominion and the world of manifestation is like the relation between a body and its shadow, or a tree and its fruit, or a cause and its effect. They see that the world of manifestation is the image (*mithāl*) of the world of dominion. This, according to al-Ghazālī, is also the key for understanding the inner meaning of the Qur’ān as well.⁶³⁸

Since the prophets enlighten the souls of other people with the information they acquire in this place, and since something which enlightens other things deserves more to be called light, then the sacred prophetic soul deserves more to be called light than the ordinary human spirit. For this reason, the Prophet of Islam is called an “illuminating lamb” (*sirāj munīr*)⁶³⁹ by God in the Qur’ān. According to al-Ghazālī, all the other prophets and men of knowledge are lambs whose lights illuminate others, but the difference among them is significant.⁶⁴⁰

However, there is also another light higher even than the prophetic soul. The lamp of the prophetic soul is likened by God to oil, which is almost luminous even though it is not touched by fire. When the fire touches it, it becomes light upon light. This fire is given to it by a lofty divine soul which is described by religion as an angel. Since the angel is the light

⁶³⁸ Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāṭ*, 132; *Niche*, 54–55.

⁶³⁹ The Qur’ān, 33:46.

⁶⁴⁰ Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāṭ*, 133; *Niche*, 55.

which illuminates the sacred prophetic soul, it better deserves to be called light than the prophetic soul itself.⁶⁴¹

According to al-Ghazālī, these explanations about the nature of light should make one understand that the order of this hierarchy cannot go on forever and must stop at a certain source. One must also realize that this source does not take its light from another source. Its light originates from its essence for its essence (*huwa al-nūr li-dhātih wa bi-dhātih*). All the other lights radiate from it in a successive order. This, in fact, is the true light, and with respect to it, all others are called lights only metaphorically. The creation and command of other lights is in its hands, since it gives light to others and sustains their existence.⁶⁴²

After explaining the various meanings of light, al-Ghazālī moves on to talk about darkness. The discussion of darkness helps him to connect the topic of light with the topic of existence. According to him, darkness, as opposed to light, is related to inexistence. A dark object is called dark because the perception cannot perceive its existence. For the perceiver then, it is inexistent even if it might exist by itself. But something which does not exist even by itself deserves even more than this to be called dark. In fact, the ultimate meaning of darkness can be fulfilled only by inexistence. Since the ultimate meaning of darkness is equal to inexistence, the ultimate meaning of light is equal to true existence.⁶⁴³

Following the ontology of light, al-Ghazālī divides existence into two parts as well: something that exists by itself and something that borrows its existence from another source. Like light borrowed from another source, borrowed existence cannot sustain its existence by

⁶⁴¹ Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt*, 134; *Niche*, 56.

⁶⁴² Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt*, 135–136; *Niche*, 57–58. Al-Ghazālī does not name God as the true light yet, but it is clear that he means God by the pronoun.

⁶⁴³ Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt*, 137; *Niche*, 58.

itself. When its essence is considered from the perspective of its essence, it appears clearly that it is total inexistence.⁶⁴⁴ It becomes existent in relation to another source, and this makes its existence not real but borrowed. For this reason, just as God is the real light, he is also the only real existent (*al-mawjūd al-ḥaqq*).⁶⁴⁵

Al-Ghazālī claims that the above knowledge is the knowledge of the Gnostics (*al-‘arīfūn*). They rise from metaphor to truth with the help of this knowledge. Starting from the lower ranks, they complete their ascension when they reach the state where they literally witness that there is nothing in existence other than God alone. The true meaning of the verse “Everything will perish except His face” (28:88) becomes clear to them. They see that everything has two faces, one of which turns towards itself and the other towards God. The face which turns towards God sustains their existence, while the face which turns towards itself is a mere illusion. For this reason, they understand that everything perishes not in a particular time, but eternally when considered in relation to His existence.⁶⁴⁶

As the only true existent, God manifests himself as light in two planes: one for the sight and sensation (*baṣar* and *ḥiss*), and the other for the insight and intellect (*basīrah* and *‘aql*). The light for the sight is the light which comes down from the Sun, the Moon, and the stars. It fills the physical world by spreading out upon the surface of material objects and it makes their colors apparent and visible in the physical world. The sight becomes capable of perception by means of this light. The light for insight, on the other hand, is the angels in the heavens and the animal and human spirits in this world. The order of the heavens is sustained

⁶⁴⁴ “*Idhā ‘utubira dhātuhu min ḥaythu dhātihi fa-huwa ‘adam maḥḍ.*” *Mishkāṭ*, 137.

⁶⁴⁵ Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāṭ*, 137; *Niche*, 58.

⁶⁴⁶ Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāṭ*, 138; *Niche*, 59.

by the angels, while the order of this world is sustained by the human spirit. This is the reason why God calls humans his caliphs in this world.⁶⁴⁷

When the order of lights becomes clear to the inquirer, he realizes that things emanate from one another in a hierarchy of stages in existence and in appearance. When he ascends to the top, he witnesses that the true source of light and existence is God only and alone. He confesses at this point that God is everything while the other things are mere metaphors.⁶⁴⁸

Therefore, al-Ghazālī explains, there are three ways of embracing the declaration of God’s unity, just as the threefold meaning of light is embraced by three different groups of people. “There is no deity but God” is the declaration of the commoner. “There is no deity but He” is for the elect. “There is no he but He” is the declaration of the elect of the elect. This order goes from more general to more specific in respect to the pure and absolute oneness and unity of God. All kinds of plurality are consumed at the last stage since there is no more stage to go beyond. This stage is the ultimate aim of the spiritual search. The reality of this stage is known by those who are knowledgeable about God (*al-‘ulamā’ bi-Allāh*) and denied by those who are ignorant.⁶⁴⁹

⁶⁴⁷ Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt*, 142; *Niche*, 62.

⁶⁴⁸ Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt*, 144; *Niche*, 63.

⁶⁴⁹ Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt*, 144; *Niche*, 64. In fact, al-Sayrawān’s edition does not include the declaration of the elect of the elect in this section. It includes the first two and misses the third. However, if interpretation were to be based on this edition, the meaning would have been incomplete. In ‘Izzat and al-Kurdī’s edition though, the declaration of the elect of the elect is given as the declaration of the elect only. See their edition, Ahmad ‘Izzat and Faraj Allah Zakī al-Kurdī, (Egypt, 1322), 23. It seems to me that combining these two editions would provide a more correct interpretation. For this reason, I am following Alexander Treiger who provides this interpretation by sensing the ambiguity of the passage. See his “Monism and Monotheism in al-Ghazālī’s *Mishkāt al-Anwār*,” *Journal of Qur’anic Studies*, 9, no. 1 (2007), 5.

4. 3 God and His Relation to Creation in *Rasā'il*

Al-Ghazālī's discussion about God in the first section of *Niche* is given above. In short, al-Ghazālī claims that there is nothing in existence other than God alone, and the rest of creation exists only metaphorically as borrowed existence. He uses the metaphor of light in order to demonstrate this point. Alexander Treiger claims that the origin of this idea is the metaphysics of Ibn Sīnā, especially his distinction between quiddity (*māhiyyah*) and existence and his proof for the existence of God.⁶⁵⁰

Treiger states that according to Ibn Sīnā, things other than God owe their existence not to their quiddity but to God. If they owed their existence to their quiddity, they would exist necessarily without ever being non-existent. But since this is not the case, they must owe their existence to an efficient cause which is the origin of their existence. The chain of efficient causes, however, cannot go on infinitely and must stop at the first efficient cause, which is God alone. Ibn Sīnā names the first efficient cause as “necessary of existence (*wājib al-wujūd*).” This being is necessarily existent by means of what he is (*li-dhātihi*), and not “possible of existence (*mumkin al-wujūd*)” like the rest of existence.⁶⁵¹

Treiger points out some similarities between Ibn Sīnā's discussion of the necessary existent and *Niche*. According to him, the lights which emanate from one another in *Niche* correspond to the chain of efficient causes in Ibn Sīnā's system, and the first efficient cause of Ibn Sīnā becomes the first light of al-Ghazālī. What exists in Ibn Sīnā's system as bestowed existence by the first efficient cause is conveyed to the reader as borrowed existence in al-Ghazālī's system. For the idea of “possible of existence,” al-Ghazālī uses the idea of the

⁶⁵⁰ Treiger, “Monism and Monotheism,” 8.

⁶⁵¹ Treiger, “Monism and Monotheism,” 8.

eternal perishing of all things other than God. For Treiger, the only contrast that exists between Ibn Sīnā and al-Ghazālī is that al-Ghazālī insists that the world is created in time.⁶⁵²

For the point al-Ghazālī makes in *Niche*, it is possible to say that *Rasā'il* appear to be a stronger source of origin than the philosophy of Ibn Sīnā. First of all, al-Ghazālī and the Ikhwān are in complete agreement when it comes to the world's creation in time. Their refutations of those who hold the doctrine of pre-eternity are similar in character as well.⁶⁵³ If Treiger is correct in comparing the first light in *Niche* to the idea of “necessary of existence (*wājib al-wujūd*)” in Ibn Sīnā, then it is possible to say again that the source is not Ibn Sīnā, since the concept exists before him in *Rasā'il*.⁶⁵⁴ What is more, the Ikhwān's discussion of God is mixed with the analogy of light as well, just like the discussion of al-Ghazālī in *Niche*.

The Ikhwān use the metaphor of light in their explanation of the process of emanation.⁶⁵⁵ According to them, the process of emanation from the first to the last resembles the flow of light and radiance in the air during the time of a full moon. It is obvious for them

⁶⁵² Treiger, “Monism and Monotheism,” 8.

⁶⁵³ This point is more relevant for the discussion of *Tahāfut*. It is mentioned here because of Treiger's remark about it. Regarding this point, *Tahāfut* can be compared with the epistles thirty nine, forty, and forty one. Abd al-Raḥmān Badawī argues that al-Ghazālī left the philosophy of Aristotle and its Muslim representatives in order to embrace the philosophy of Plotinus and Neoplatonism which, according to him, is more compatible with Islam. Badawī claims that the source al-Ghazālī used during the composition of *Tahāfut* was the works Proclus (d.485) and John Philoponus (d. 570). In light of the epistles thirty nine, forty, and forty one, it is possible to say that *Rasā'il*, which was more readily available to al-Ghazālī, might also have served as a source of inspiration for him. See Badawī's “al-Ghazālī wa-Maṣādiruhu al-Yūnāniyyah,” in *Mihrijān al-Ghazālī fī Dimashq: Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī fī al-Dhikrā al-Miawīyyah al-Tāsiyah li-Milādihī*, ed. Zakī Najīb Mahmūd (Cairo: Matbūat al-Majlis al-A'lā li-Riāyat al-Funūn wa-al-Ādāb wa-al-'Ulūm al-'Ijtimā'iyyah, 1962), 221–237.

⁶⁵⁴ *Rasā'il*, v. 2, 358.

⁶⁵⁵ *Rasā'il*, v. 1, 162.

that the light in the air does not originate from the moon itself but comes to it from the body of the sun. The Ikhwān, however, go beyond the metaphor when they say that the sun and all the other stars take their light from the light of the universal soul, which takes its light from the light of the universal intellect. The light of the universal intellect itself emanates from the light of the Creator, as expressed in the famous light verse.⁶⁵⁶

As in the discussion of al-Ghazālī, knowledge of God occupies a central place in *Rasā'il* as well. The Ikhwān relate that the ultimate point of felicity, the most complete outcome, and the highest rank is the one that is achieved by the friends of God. One of their qualities which elevate them to this point is their cognition of God. Again, the metaphor of light is present in the explanation. Like the seeker of al-Ghazālī, their cognitive process starts from the bottom as well. They realize that particular souls spread in the world as lights and radiances. And after that, they realize that the particular soul is a force which emanates (*quwwah*⁶⁵⁷ *munbajisah fā'idah*) from the universal soul. Then, they know that the universal soul is a force which emanates from the universal intellect. And then, they know that the universal intellect is a light which emanates from the existence of the Creator (*nur fā'id min wujūd al-Bārī*). At this point, they know that God is the light of lights and the only existent which exists in utmost purity (*maḥḍ al-wujūd*). As the only eternal being, he is the source of all other existence and the giver of all virtues, blessings, and felicity.⁶⁵⁸

⁶⁵⁶ *Rasā'il*, v. 3, 233.

⁶⁵⁷ "*Quwwah*" is usually translated as "faculty" when it is related to psychology. Here, I preferred to use "force" since it seems more appropriate in the context.

⁶⁵⁸ *Rasā'il*, v. 3, 280–281. They say in volume 3, p. 234 "*wa ilayhi yarji' al-amr kulluh, li-anna bihi wujūdahā wa-qiwāmahā wa-baqā'ahā wa-dawāmahā wa-kamālahā. Li-annahū huwa al-mawjūd al-maḥḍ, wa lahu al-baqā' wa-al-dawām al-sarmad wa-al-tamām wa-al-kamāl al-muayyad.*" This is almost identical with al-Ghazālī's "*lā mawjūda illā huwa.*"

According to the Ikhwān, those who are ignorant about God are ignorant of him not because of his hiddenness, but because of the strength of his presence and light.⁶⁵⁹ These people do not know how to pursue knowledge of God, and think that they can acquire it through the method of acquisition which is used for knowledge of created things. The Ikhwān state that knowledge of created things is acquired through nine questions. These questions are the means which are used in human apprehension of created things. When it comes to God, however, none but two can be asked about God.⁶⁶⁰ In order to demonstrate that al-Ghazālī fully incorporates the Ikhwān’s discussion of the topic in his *Niche*, it will be appropriate to quote them here in order. The Ikhwān say:

Then know that it cannot be asked of his whatness (quiddity), and of his quality, and of his quantity, and of his relation, and of his whereness, and of his whenness, and of his cause about the one who is the producer of all essences (*mubdi‘ al-huwiyyāt*), and the endengerer of all quiddities (*mumhī al-māhiyyāt*), and the originator of all qualities (*mūjid al-kammiyyāt*), and the source of all attributes (*mukayyif al-kayfiyyāt*), and the specifier of all specifications (*mumayyiz al-ayniyyāt*), and the arranger of all spacial connections (*murattib al-aynaniyyāt*), and the cause of all casual relations (*‘illat al-limmiyyāt*). Among these inquiries and investigations, only two of them are possible and conceivable to ask about him. These two questions are: is he, and who is he. In response to them, it can be said that he is the one who did this and that, and the one who created this and that. For this reason, Moses did not

⁶⁵⁹ “Thumma i’lam annahū lam yafut man fātahū wijdānuhū min ajl khafā’i dhātihī wa diqqat šifātihī, wa kitmānihī, wa lākin min shiddat zuhūrihī wa jalālat nūrihī.” *Rasā’il*, v. 3, 421. This statement must remind us the veil tradition al-Ghazālī explains in *Niche*.

⁶⁶⁰ *Rasā’il*, v. 3, 421. The Ikhwān elaborate these questions in detail in v. 1, 256–259. These nine questions are an incomplete version of Aristotle’s ten categories; see Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (New Jersey: Princeton University Press), v. 1, 4.

give the answer of what to Pharaoh when he asked him “*what is the lord of the universe?*” but instead gave him the answer of who which is the only answer that is appropriate to his lordship. Thus, Moses said to him that he is “*the lord of the heavens and the earth and what is in between.*” Moses’ answer did not satisfy Pharaoh and he said to those around him “*do you hear it,*”⁶⁶¹ I ask him what he is but he answers me by saying who he is.” In the same way, the polytheists of Quraysh and their disputants asked the prophet by saying that “we worship our idols and deities, and we see, certify and know them. Inform us about your God to whom you worship. What is he?” Then God revealed to his apostle in response to their question “*Say that he is Allah who is one.*”⁶⁶² They protested that the answer is not comprehensible and conceivable, and kept asking about the whatness of his essence... But God is exalted and high above what the wrongdoers say about him by great sublimity.⁶⁶³

In this passage, the Ikhwān claim that the philosophical investigation about the whatness and essence of God is not comprehensible and conceivable, and the method of investigation which is applied to other things cannot be applied to God. Al-Ghazālī claims the same thing using almost the same words in *Niche*. After narrating the story of Abraham’s ascent in the Qur’ān,⁶⁶⁴ he says:

⁶⁶¹ *The Qur’ān*, 26: 23–26.

⁶⁶² *The Qur’ān*, 112: 1.

⁶⁶³ *Rasā’il*, v. 3, 421–422.

⁶⁶⁴ *The Qur’ān*, 6: 74–79. The Ikhwān allude to this story in v. 4, 20 when they invite their brothers to board their ship by saying, “Would you like to gaze with us so that you can see the Kingdom of Heaven and become one of those who are convinced and certain as was previously seen by our father Abraham as well when he was covered by the night completely.”

Now what is meant to be conveyed by this “that who⁶⁶⁵” is the vaguest kind of indication, destitute of all relation or comparison. For, were anyone to ask, “What is the symbol comparable with or corresponding to this That?” no answer to the question could be conceived. Now He Who transcends all relations is Allāh, the One Reality. Thus, when certain Arabs once asked the Apostle of God, “To what may we relate Allāh?” this reply was revealed, “*Say, He, Allāh is one! His days are neither ended nor begun; neither is He a father nor a son; and none is like unto Him, no not one*”⁶⁶⁶ the meaning of which verse is simply that He transcends relation. Again, when Pharaoh said to Moses: “*What, pray, is the Lord of the Universe?*”⁶⁶⁷ as though demanding to know His essence, Moses, in his reply, merely indicated *His works*, because these were clearer to the mind of his interrogator; and answered, “*The Lord of the heavens and the earth.*” But Pharaoh said to his courtiers, “*Ha! Marked ye that!*” as though objecting to Moses’ evasion of his demand to be told Allāh’s essential nature. Then Moses said, “*Your Lord, and your first fathers’ Lord.*” Pharaoh then set him down as insane. He had demanded an analogue, for the description of the divine Essence, and Moses replied to him from His works. And so Pharaoh said, “*Your prophet who has been sent you is insane.*”⁶⁶⁸

Treiger points out that there is an important philosophical term hidden in this passage of *Niche*, and this term is *māhiyyah* (whatness or quiddity). According to him, al-Ghazālī builds his interpretation of the Qur’ānic dialogue between Moses and Pharaoh around this term.⁶⁶⁹ Treiger takes the presence of this term in al-Ghazālī as evidence of philosophical

⁶⁶⁵ This refers to the saying of Abraham, *The Qur’ān*, 6: 79, “I have turned my face unto That Who made the heavens and the earth! I am a true believer, and not of those who associate other gods with Allāh!”

⁶⁶⁶ *The Qur’ān*, 112: 1–4.

⁶⁶⁷ *The Qur’ān*, 26: 23–27.

⁶⁶⁸ *Mishkāt*, 154–155; *Niche*, 72–73.

⁶⁶⁹ Treiger, “Monism and Monotheism,” 4.

influence in his thought, and when he says philosophical influence he usually means Ibn Sīnā.⁶⁷⁰ But the same term is at the center of the Ikhwān's discussion of the same Qur'ānic verses. It can certainly be said that the interpretation is not al-Ghazālī's but rather the Ikhwan's. The only part which al-Ghazālī omits is the Ikhwān's explicit discussion of philosophical questions. Al-Ghazālī's omission of this part is understandable when it is considered in the context of his efforts to conceal his philosophical connections.

There is another important point in *Rasā'il* which persistently brings to mind al-Ghazālī's struggle to save God's free will over his creation. On one hand, the Ikhwān embrace the theory of emanation in *Rasā'il*, but, on the other hand, they ardently support God's free will over his actions in the process of creation. They are in complete agreement with al-Ghazālī in this respect as well. Instead of using the word *khalq*, which they explain as creation of something out of something (*ījād al-shay' min shay'*), they use the word *ibda'* for God's creative act, which, according to them, means creation of something out of nothing (*ījād al-shay' min lā shay'*).⁶⁷¹ They realize that the metaphor of light is not adequate regarding this matter, and instead use the metaphor of speech in order to convey what they mean. They say the following in the chapter concerning the existence of the universe from God:

Know that the emanation of the universe from the Creator is not like the creation of a house by a builder or a book by a writer. They are permanently independent with their own essence and free from the writer or the builder after they are done with writing or building. But it is like the emanation of speech from

⁶⁷⁰ Treiger, "Monism and Monotheism," 15.

⁶⁷¹ *Rasā'il*, v. 3, 424. According to Frank Griffel, al-Ghazālī finds a very elegant way between adopting the determinist cosmology of Ibn Sīnā and remaining a devout Muslim who wishes to preserve God's free will over his action; Griffel, *al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, 11–12. I think Griffel means the theory of emanation with determinist cosmology. This concern of al-Ghazālī is visible in *Rasā'il* as well.

aspeaker. When he becomes silent, the speech ceases to exist. The speech goes on existing as long as the speaker goes on speaking, and when he stops speaking it stops existing. Or it is like the existence of lamplight in the air. As long as the lamp remains lit, the light continues to exist. Or it is like the existence of sunlight in the sky. When the sun sets, the light disappears from the air. Or it is like the existence of the warming heat of fire. When the fire goes out, its warmth and light disappear as well...

Then know that the speech of the speaker is not his constituent part, but it is an act which he performs or a thing which he produces or manifests after its non-existence. This also is the condition of the sunlight which is seen in the sky. It is not a constituent part of the sun, but something independent which inundates and overflows from it. This is the condition of the warmth of fire as well, which overflows from it as surplus and spreads around without being its constituent part. This is the condition and the metaphor of the emanation of the universe from God. Like them, the universe is not a constituent part of God, but it is a surplus he chooses to give, and a deluge of generosity he endows, and an act he performs after its non-existence. God is like the speaker who makes his speech manifest after not speaking, and the speech is not his constituent part, but it is an act he performs or a product he produces. Then, the condition of the emanation of the universe from God became clear already from the examples we introduced here. But do not surmise and have the opinion that the universe emanates from God by nature without his will as the sunlight exists in the sky by nature without the will of the sun. The sun does not have the power to prevent its light from flowing because of its nature given to it by the Lord of the universe. But God is free to choose his action; if he wills, then he does it; and if he wills to refrain from it, then he refrains from it. In this respect, he is like the speaker who has the power to speak. If he wills, then he speaks; if he wills to refrain from it, then he becomes silent. This is the condition of God's creation and invention (*ikhtirā*). If he wills, then his generosity, his graciousness, his benefaction, his beneficence, and the

manifestation of his compassion and wisdom overflow from him; and if he wills, then he refrains from action. And if he wills, then there is not any impossibility for the actualization of his action. This is because he is willfully powerful to act and not to act.⁶⁷²

Like al-Ghazālī again, the Ikhwān advocate the idea of creation out of nothing and defend it against those who hold the doctrine of pre-eternity.⁶⁷³ They assert that the souls of those who believe in or entertain the idea of the pre-eternity of the world are in the sleep of negligence and will die the death of ignorance. Their belief in pre-eternity prevents them from asking questions and raising problems concerning the creator, his actions, and his intentions. For the Ikhwān, the right questions impel one's soul in the right direction and awake one's soul from the sleep of ignorance.⁶⁷⁴

4. 4 Two Worlds and the Five Grades of Human Soul as the Means of Ascension

One of the accusations al-Ghazālī faced during the Nishapur controversy was connected with his position regarding the human soul. According to the accusers, he advocated the philosophical teaching that the human soul was a stranger in this world and aspired to reach to its original place, which is the world supernal.⁶⁷⁵ One of the sources from which the accusers drew this conclusion was *Niche*, especially the passages in which al-Ghazālī talks about the two worlds and the role of the human soul in apprehending the

⁶⁷² *Rasā'il*, v. 3, 277–278; for similar discussions, see also v. 3, 290 and v. 5, 268.

⁶⁷³ Martin Whittingham says, "Perhaps, then, the Ikhwān are al-Ghazālī's inspiration for the blend of creation and emanation subtly introduced into *Mishkāt*." See Whittingham's *al-Ghazālī and the Qur'ān: One Book, Many Meanings* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 116.

⁶⁷⁴ *Rasā'il*, v. 3, 279–280

⁶⁷⁵ Al-Ghazālī, *Makātib*, 12.

connection between them. Al-Ghazālī's discussion of the topic is also connected with the apprehension of physical and spiritual lights as discussed above.

Al-Ghazālī states in *Niche* that there are two worlds in existence. These worlds are expressed by several pairs of names, such as the world spiritual and the world material, or the world sensual and the world intelligible, or the world inferior and the world supernal. One should not be misled by the multiplicity of names and assume that they are more than two. They can as well be expressed with the names "the world of dominance and sense-perception (*'alam al-mulk wa al-shahādah*) and the world of the unseen and the realm supernal (*'alam al-ghayb wa al-malakūt*)." The point al-Ghazālī tries to make here is that one of them is seen by everybody while the other is invisible to the majority of men.⁶⁷⁶

According to al-Ghazālī, there is a connection between these two worlds, and this connection makes upward progress possible. The connection is that everything which exists in the visible world has an image or a symbol in the invisible world and, for this reason, the visible world is the ladder that takes one to the invisible world. He who cannot climb up to the invisible world cannot get close to the sacred and protected presence of God, which transcends the apprehension of the senses and the imagination. The human soul serves as the passage between these worlds by catching glimmers of the sacred transcendent plane of existence.⁶⁷⁷

Just like the different grades of light and existence, there are five different faculties or grades of human soul which correspond to the different grades of light and existence.⁶⁷⁸ That is to say that his discussion about the grades of the human soul resembles his discussion about

⁶⁷⁶ Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāṭ*, 151–152; *Niche*, 69–70.

⁶⁷⁷ Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāṭ*, 152–153; *Niche*, 70.

⁶⁷⁸ Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāṭ*, 168; *Niche*, 84

the grades of light and existence. In a way, the amount of knowledge humans can have about God depends on the grade of soul they use for catching divine lights, and consequently this determines their location in the classification he makes later in the third section of the book.

Al-Ghazālī gives the first one of these grades as the sensory soul (*al-rūḥ al-ḥassās*), which receives the information brought in by the senses. It is what makes an animal an animal and is also present in an infant at the breast.⁶⁷⁹

The second grade is the imaginative soul (*al-rūḥ al-khayālī*), which records the information communicated by the senses and keeps it filed and ready for the soul above it. This soul is not found in an infant at the beginning of life and develops only later when he gets a little bit older. Some animals possess it while the others do not. For example, the dog that has previously been whipped runs away whenever he sees someone with a stick in hand. But the moth, on the other hand, desires to reach the light and forgets the flame immediately every time he escapes from fire.⁶⁸⁰

The third grade is the rational soul (*al-rūḥ al-‘aqlī*), which apprehends concepts beyond the spheres of sense and imagination. This grade represents a uniquely human characteristic and does not exist in other animals or the infant. It apprehends the necessary and universal axioms as explained previously by the superiority of the light of intelligence over the light of the eye.⁶⁸¹

The fourth grade is the speculative soul (*al-rūḥ al-fikrī*) which receives the pure axioms of the rational soul. It then combines and arranges these together as premises and

⁶⁷⁹ Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāṭ*, 165; *Niche*, 81.

⁶⁸⁰ Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāṭ*, 165; *Niche*, 81.

⁶⁸¹ Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāṭ*, 166; *Niche*, 82.

deduces from them further information. The new information becomes new premises at its disposal and this process may go on indefinitely.⁶⁸²

The fifth grade is the sacred prophetic soul (*al-rūḥ al-qudsī al-nabawī*), which is the highest. This grade is unique to the prophets and some friends of God. The glimmers of the unseen world, the conditions of the hereafter, the several sciences of the celestial and terrestrial realms, and the various divine sciences are apprehended by means of this soul. The rational and speculative souls fall short of acquiring the knowledge apprehended in this grade.⁶⁸³ The rank of sacred prophetic soul is so high that it is described in the Qur'ān by the words "whose oil would almost glow even if untouched by Fire."⁶⁸⁴ This means that there are saints endowed with this soul who are almost independent from the help of prophets, and there are prophets who are almost independent from the help of angels.⁶⁸⁵

The Qur'ānic story of Abraham exemplifies the symbolism of man's ascent from the visible world to the invisible world. Since everything which exists in the invisible world has a symbol in the visible world, the soul moves gradually from symbols to the invisible plane of spiritual beings. The different grades of overflowing lights from the spiritual beings serve as guides to the human soul in its ascension.⁶⁸⁶

According to the story, Abraham begins to search for his Lord when he reaches the age of discernment. First, he sees that his father and his people worship idols, and thinks that

⁶⁸² Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāṭ*, 166; *Niche*, 82.

⁶⁸³ Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāṭ*, 166; *Niche*, 82.

⁶⁸⁴ The Qur'ān, 24: 35.

⁶⁸⁵ Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāṭ*, 170–171; *Niche*, 86. The Ikhwān give a similar account of these grades in *Rasā'il*, v. 1, 298–299.

⁶⁸⁶ Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāṭ*, 154; *Niche*, 71.

they are in error. When the night covers Abraham, he sees a rising star and is fascinated by its light. Because of his fascination, he thinks that it must be his Lord. But he is disappointed when the star sets a little later, and confesses that something which sets cannot be his lord. A little later he sees the moon rising and again is fascinated by its light, which he finds greater than the star. But again, he is disappointed when the moon sets at the end of the night. At this point, he becomes confused and asks for guidance from God by confessing that without guidance he will be one of those who have gone astray. Then, he sees the sun rising and filling the world with its light. He thinks that it is greater than the moon and must be the Lord. But again, when it sets, he confesses that God is beyond the things that people associate with him. At this stage, he becomes one of those who are certain in faith by knowing God from his creative activities.⁶⁸⁷

In the process of searching for his Lord, Abraham moves from the most readily perceivable objects to the most abstract mode of being by using the faculties of his soul. His soul is not content with staying in the visible world.⁶⁸⁸ Whenever he submits himself to a higher being as his Lord, the higher faculty of his soul warns him not to be content with it and urges him to search for a higher being. The star, the moon, and the sun in the story are the visible symbols of spiritual beings through which Abraham ascends to the invisible world. These spiritual beings are known as angels in the religious literature and are called as Lords by different groups of people. In the end, Abraham finds the transcendent Lord of Lords who is also the light of lights as explained above.

According to al-Ghazālī, the sun, the moon and the stars in the story represent the descending order of angels in the invisible world. He states that the angels in the spiritual

⁶⁸⁷ The Qur'ān, 6: 75–79; al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt*, 154; *Niche*, 71–72.

⁶⁸⁸ In fact, al-Ghazālī does not take the story in its literal meaning. For him, the visible objects in the story are symbols of spiritual objects which are angels.

world are sometimes called lords (*arbāb*) by the people. The angels differ in rank because of the brightness of their lights, just like the heavenly objects. God, as the light of lights, is the Lord of lords in this respect.⁶⁸⁹

The essence of al-Ghazālī's interpretation of the story of Abraham is present in *Rasā'il*. According to the Ikhwān, there is an interrelation between idolatry and the worship of the true God. They state that idolatry, the stage below astrolatry, begins with the worship of angels. They think that the reason behind the worship of angels is people's desire to get closer to God with the help of their mediation. In order to demonstrate their point, the Ikhwān give the example of those who try to reach the king through the mediation of his viziers, servants, and relatives. But the condition of people regarding the worship of God is that sometimes during the process of mediation, they forget who the real God is and stay at the lower stages engaged in the worship of angels, stars, or idols. Those who contemplate deeply on the mysterious and wondrous acts of God, however, realize that God is truly the only one worthy of being called Lord.⁶⁹⁰

Also, the science of dream interpretation, which is a genuine part of prophecy, corroborates with the symbolism used in this story.⁶⁹¹ According to this science, the sun in a dream must be interpreted as a sovereign king because of their resemblance in sovereignty and their overflowing influence over all others. The moon must be interpreted as his vizier because of his borrowed sovereignty during the absence of a real sovereign. Through the moon and the vizier, the influence of real power is conveyed to the area of their influence.⁶⁹²

⁶⁸⁹ Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāṭ*, 154; *Niche*, 71.

⁶⁹⁰ *Rasā'il*, v. 3, 396.

⁶⁹¹ Compare with *Rasā'il*, v. 4, 80.

⁶⁹² Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāṭ*, 155; *Niche*, 73.

The dualism al-Ghazālī presents here is at the center of *Rasā'il* as well. Like al-Ghazālī, the Ikhwān divide everything that is in existence into two classes: material beings, which can be perceived by the senses, and spiritual beings, which can be comprehended by the intellect. Like Abraham in the story, the Ikhwān also do not describe God as being either material or spiritual. They assert that he is the cause of all existence and transcends these two spheres.⁶⁹³

Like al-Ghazālī, the Ikhwān also consider material objects as the images and signs of spiritual beings. According to them, the objects of the senses are the ladders which take one towards the knowledge of spiritual beings, and this knowledge is the ultimate aim of the human soul. For them, knowledge of material beings means the poverty of soul while knowledge of spiritual beings means its affluence.⁶⁹⁴

Similar to al-Ghazālī's interpretation of the stars as angels, the Ikhwān state that the heavenly spheres are occupied by spiritual beings known as angels in the religious literature.⁶⁹⁵ Their discussion of the topic includes a discussion of the sovereign king and his vizier as well. According to them, God created the angels in order to give them the responsibility of governing the universe just like he gives the kings the responsibility of governing this world.⁶⁹⁶ Like al-Ghazālī, they too say that the sun is like a sovereign king among the stars and the moon is like his vizier and his crown prince.⁶⁹⁷

⁶⁹³ *Rasā'il*, v. 3, 195.

⁶⁹⁴ *Rasā'il*, v. 3, 202–203.

⁶⁹⁵ *Rasā'il*, v. 1, 161; v. 2, 133–135.

⁶⁹⁶ *Rasā'il*, v. 1, 161.

⁶⁹⁷ *Rasā'il*, v. 1, 165; v. 2, 242.

It is possible to conclude from these similarities that al-Ghazālī's interpretation of the story of Abraham is based on the principles he extracts from *Rasā'il*. Al-Ghazālī is not hesitant to agree with the Ikhwān's doctrine of dualism, and the logical conclusion of it compels him to accept that there is another meaning behind the literal meaning of the Qur'ān. This is because of the assumption that the origin of the Qur'ān is the spiritual world, while its target audience is the people who have to live in the material world with the language of this material world. His acceptance of this principle makes al-Ghazālī vulnerable to being criticized as a hidden esoteric, and he seems to be aware of this fact since he includes in *Niche* an apologetic discussion of his stance on the matter.⁶⁹⁸

Since al-Ghazālī is aware of this vulnerability, he tries to defend himself in *Niche* by saying that he should not be considered an esoteric because of the interpretations he presents. He asserts fervently that unlike the esoteric, he does not deny the reality of the literal signification of the verses of the Qur'ān even though he accepts another level of truth beyond them. According to him, those who deny the literal meaning of a verse completely in favor of an esoteric one and those who deny the existence of any inner meaning completely beyond a literal one both look at the matter from only one side, and this makes their interpretations deficient. As opposed to their approach, a proper interpretation must take the visible and the invisible significations into consideration together. For this reason in fact, as al-Ghazālī supports his position, the prophet said that “the Qur'ān has an outward and an inward, a beginning and an end.”⁶⁹⁹

⁶⁹⁸ For the influence of esotericism in the interpretive efforts of al-Ghazālī, see Whittingham's *al-Ghazālī and the Qur'ān*, especially see his discussion of the Ikhwān on pages 47–50, 59–60, 67–69, 122–123. Also see Mustafa Öztürk, *Kur'an ve Aşırı Yorum: Tefsirde Bâtınlılık ve Bâtını Te'vil Geleneği* (Ankara: Kitâbiyât, 2003), 344–349.

⁶⁹⁹ Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt*, 161–162; *Niche*, 77.

4. 5 Classifying Men According to Their Distance from the Light of God

Because of the controversy around it, the third section of *Niche* occupies an important place in the Ghazālīan literature and thus is known by a special name as the Veils Section.⁷⁰⁰ In this section, al-Ghazālī provides to the inquirer a detailed classification of men based on their closeness to God by using the veil tradition.⁷⁰¹ As al-Ghazālī indicates at the beginning of the book, the subject of the tradition is in common with the subject of the light verse, as both of them are related to the understanding of the nature of God as light and its perception by different groups of people.⁷⁰²

Even though the tradition says that there are seventy veils which prevent people from apprehending God, al-Ghazālī assumes that the number seventy is not given as a specification of quantity but as an expression of multiplicity.⁷⁰³ Based on this assumption, he feels safe to provide his own classification and divides people into three categories: people who are veiled by absolute darkness (*bi-mujarrad al-ẓulmah*), people who are veiled by the mixture of light and darkness (*bi-nūr maqrūn bi-ẓulmah*), and people who are veiled by pure light (*bi-al-nūr al-mahḍ*).⁷⁰⁴ Above all of them, there is a fourth class of people who are not veiled at all by anything.

Before presenting the details of al-Ghazālī's classification, it seems appropriate to quote what the Ikhwān say about the different grades of men in connection with the light

⁷⁰⁰ For example see, W. Montgomery Watt, "A Forgery in al-Ghazālī's *Mishkāt*?" 5.

⁷⁰¹ The tradition is "God has Seventy Thousand Veils of Light and Darkness. Were He to withdraw their curtain, then would the splendours of His Aspect surely consume everyone who apprehended Him with his sight."

⁷⁰² Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt*, 116; *Niche*, 44.

⁷⁰³ Al-Ghazālī states that there are other reports which read "seven hundreds" or "seventy thousand." These readings support his assumption.

⁷⁰⁴ Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt*, 175; *Niche*, 88.

verse. Even though their discussion here is not followed immediately by a detailed classification like al-Ghazālī's, it includes the main idea of al-Ghazālī's discussion.⁷⁰⁵ The Ikhwān say the following:

Know, then, that what hinders the particular souls from receiving the emanation of the Universal Soul is their sinking in the sea of matter and the accumulation of the obscurations of the bodies before their sight, owing to the strength of their inclination towards physical passions and their illusion of bodily pleasures; and when they are awakened from the sleep of their carelessness and woken up from the slumber of their ignorance, and they begin to rise in sciences and knowledge and persist in that condition, they come into contact with the Universal Soul, witness those intellectual and radiant lights, and attain those spiritual delectations and those eternal, everlasting joys. Instead, when they resist against what we described and incline towards the pursuit of carnal passions and to the rank of nature, they go far away from here, sink to the lowest of the low, and are submerged in the sea of matter, where its waves envelop them and its obscurations accumulate before their sight. He, be He blessed and exalted, hinted at these two conditions, saying, *Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The parable of His Light is as if there were a Niche and within it a Lamp: the Lamp enclosed in Glass: the Glass as it were a brilliant star: lit from a blessed Tree, an Olive, neither of the East nor of the West, whose oil is well-nigh luminous, though fire scarce touched it: Light upon Light! Allah doth guide whom He will to His Light: Allah doth set forth Parables for men: and Allah doth know all things*, and He, be He exalted, said, *Or (the Unbelievers' state) is like the depths of darkness in a vast deep ocean, overwhelmed with billow topped by billow, topped by*

⁷⁰⁵ As pointed out by Hermann Landolt, the Ikhwān present a loose classification in the epistle forty two entitled *fi al-āra' wa al-diyānāt* (on doctrines and religions.) See Landolt's "Ghazālī and 'Religionswissenschaft'," 28–31.

(dark) clouds: depths of darkness, one above another: if a man stretches out his hand,
he can hardly see it! For any to whom Allah giveth not light, there is no light!⁷⁰⁶

It is possible to say from this passage that according to the Ikhwān, people differ from each other in their rank based on the intensity of their inclination towards the material and the spiritual worlds. The inclination towards the material world, with its physical passions and bodily pleasures, obscures their sight and prevents them from receiving the emanation of the Universal Soul.⁷⁰⁷ On the other hand, when they incline towards the sciences and knowledge and persist in them, they begin to rise in their rank until they come into contact with the Universal Soul. At this stage, they witness the intellectual and radiant lights, and attain spiritual pleasures and eternal joys.⁷⁰⁸

As always visible in *Rasā'il*, the Ikhwān warn people in this passage as well that if they plunge into the world of material objects and spend all their effort in the pursuit of carnal pleasures, they will be veiled by ignorance. For the Ikhwān, however, people should be awakened from their sleep of ignorance and should cultivate the sciences and practices so that their souls become clean and reach the highest levels of light. The Veils Section of al-Ghazālī's *Niche* is built on the idea of the spiritual progress of men as a whole from material to spiritual, as always expressed by the Ikhwān.⁷⁰⁹

⁷⁰⁶ *Rasā'il*, v. 2, 19; *Epistles of The Brethren of Purity: On the Natural Sciences: An Arabic Critical Edition and English Translation of EPISTLES 15-21*, ed. and trans. Carmela Baffioni (Oxford: Oxford University Press in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2013), 117.

⁷⁰⁷ According to the Ikhwān, the Universal Soul is not the highest being in existence. Above it, there exist the Universal Intellect and God. The Universal Soul is the mover of the highest sphere and is also considered an angel. See for example *Rasā'il*, v. 3, 33. The connection among these will be discussed later in the chapter.

⁷⁰⁸ When they talk about the Qur'ānic verse 83:15 "On that day, they are veiled from their Lord," the Ikhwān say that veil means their ignorance of God and the paucity of their cognition of him, see *Rasā'il*, v. 3, 276.

⁷⁰⁹ Landolt, "Ghazālī and 'Religionswissenschaft'," 31.

According to al-Ghazālī, the first class consists of those who are veiled by absolute darkness. He says that they are the atheists (*mulḥidah*) who do not believe in God and the judgment day. The only life they love is their present life, since they do not have any knowledge about the life that is to come. They can be categorized under two categories: those who desire to find a cause for existence and those who do not busy themselves with such a cause and prefer to focus on their own selves.⁷¹⁰

Those who desire to find a cause for existence think that the cause is nature itself, even though they know that it is dark and does not have knowledge, perception, self-consciousness, or consciousness. According to al-Ghazālī, nature is only an attribute which inheres in the material objects without having a light of its own for sight to perceive.⁷¹¹

Those who do not busy themselves with such a cause occupy themselves with their own selves. They live the lives of the beasts, taking their pleasures and caprices as their gods. Some of them think that the ultimate aim of life is the satisfaction of carnal desires by seeking pleasure in sexual activities, eating, and clothing. Some of them think that the ultimate aim is the conquest and domination of other people by killing and enslaving them, while the others think that it is wealth, prosperity, and personal reputation. For each group, what they are after is the utmost point of happiness and the ultimate aim of life. Thus, their lives lack any kind of divine presence even in its most degenerate form. For al-Ghazālī, their rank is below the rank of animals and they are the ones who are veiled by pure darkness.⁷¹²

According to the Ikhwān as well, the worst of all people are those who do not adhere to any religion and do not believe in the judgment day. Since they do not believe in anything,

⁷¹⁰ Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāṭ*, 177; *Niche*, 89.

⁷¹¹ Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāṭ*, 177; *Niche*, 89.

⁷¹² Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāṭ*, 177–179; *Niche*, 90–93

they do not seek after the rewards of the afterlife or exert any effort to escape its punishments.⁷¹³ In another place, the Ikhwān argue that the reason for their unbelief is their materialist conception of the world. Because of this conception, they believe in the pre-eternity of the world and let their soul sleep in negligence and ignorance. The belief in pre-eternity prevents them from asking questions and raising problems concerning the creator, his actions, and his intentions. Since they do not ask questions and raise problems, they do not search for answers and solutions. Since they do not search for answers, they do not gain any knowledge about the matter. And since they do not have knowledge, their souls stay permanently in the sleep of negligence unaware the signs and warnings. Thus their souls slowly die in the darkness of ignorance. After losing their souls, they are left in this world with their bodies only. Then they indulge in eating and drinking, in pleasing themselves with bodily pleasures, and persisting in their evil acts and feeling superior to others.⁷¹⁴

Al-Ghazālī's opposition to the body is visible in *Rasā'il* as well. According to the Ikhwān, the human body is the source of all kinds of stench, impurity, filth, and dirt. When the soul stops seeking knowledge of God and worshiping him, and ceases to contemplate about its destination and the methods of preparing for it, then it begins to worship the body like an idol-worshipper who worships his idol day and night. Just as the clouds function like an obstacle between the light of the sun and the eye of the spectator, the humors of the body function like an obstacle between the light of the intellect and the faculty of speculation.⁷¹⁵ At

⁷¹³ *Rasā'il*, v. 3, 371–372; Landolt, "Ghazālī and 'Religionswissenschaft'," 29.

⁷¹⁴ *Rasā'il*, v. 3, 279–280; see also v. 3, 375–376.

⁷¹⁵ The Ikhwān think that the reason behind people's acceptance of pre-eternity is not the innate weakness of their intellect and reasoning, but the accidental calamities which befall the intellect like pride, envy, greed, hate, partisanship, tribal fanaticism, and arrogance. See *Rasā'il*, v. 3, 376–378; Landolt, "Ghazālī and 'Religionswissenschaft,'" 29.

this stage, their bodies overcome them thoroughly and they become like atheists who are veiled from God completely, not knowing and recognizing their creator and sustainer.⁷¹⁶

The second class of al-Ghazālī consists of those who are veiled by the mixture of light and darkness. Unlike the first class, they deify something outside of their own selves and have yearnings for the knowledge of God. The presence of light in their concealment from God means that there exists some amount of divinity in their perception of the universe, while the presence of darkness indicates that their perception is still heavily contaminated by false conclusions about the nature of the divine. Based on the source of their false conclusions, al-Ghazālī divides this class into three categories: those who depend on their senses and are misguided by them, those who depend on their imaginations and are misguided by them, and those who depend on the deficient analogies of their intellect and are misguided by them.⁷¹⁷

Al-Ghazālī gives six subdivisions under the first category of the second class. The first are the idolaters who have some conceptions about God, such as his strength and beauty, but who are veiled by their senses from knowing that they must seek them beyond the world of perception. Because of this condition, they find precious and beautiful materials, create images from them, attach their conception of God to these images and worship them as their God. Thus, the senses, which are pure darkness in relation to the spiritual and intellectual world, block out the light of God from their perceptions.⁷¹⁸

The second subdivision is the remote tribes of Turkic people who do not have any kind of religious organization or institution. They believe that there is a deity which is a beautiful object. When they see any object of exceptional beauty they think it is their God and

⁷¹⁶ *Rasā'il*, v. 3, 42–44.

⁷¹⁷ Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāṭ*, 180; *Niche*, 91.

⁷¹⁸ Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāṭ*, 180; *Niche*, 91–92.

start to worship it. According to al-Ghazālī, they go beyond the idolaters by abstracting beauty from individual objects and not creating their own God by their own hands. But still, their conception of beauty is mixed with the darkness of the senses.⁷¹⁹

The third subdivision is the fire-worshippers. On the one hand, they think that their deity must be luminous in essence, magnificent in appearance, powerful in nature, venerable in presence, and unapproachable in distance. On the other hand, for them, this deity must be perceptible since they cannot comprehend anything beyond perception. They find these qualities in fire, and thus take that as their God and worship it.⁷²⁰

The fourth subdivision is the star-worshippers. They go beyond the fire-worshippers since they realize that people have total control over fire, and thus that it cannot be their God. They look for the qualities of fire high and above and find the stars in heaven. Since they also have some knowledge about the stars and think that each of them has special influence over people, they take them as their gods and worship them. But their conception of deity is still in the sphere of sense perception.⁷²¹

The fifth subdivision is the sun-worshippers. They agree with the fourth category in their fundamental ideas, but think that their deity must be the greatest among the light-giving substances. They find this quality in the sun, which is perceivable by the sight, and take it as their God and worship it.⁷²²

The sixth subdivision is the dualists. They think that the sun has no monopoly over light since there are other objects with their own lights. The deity, according to them, must not

⁷¹⁹ Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāṭ*, 181–182; *Niche*, 92.

⁷²⁰ Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāṭ*, 181; *Niche*, 92.

⁷²¹ Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāṭ*, 181; *Niche*, 92–93.

⁷²² Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāṭ*, 181; *Niche*, 93.

have any partner in lightfulness and must be one in this respect. They think that this condition is fulfilled only by the Absolute Light, which, for them, is source of all good things, and take it as the Lord of the Universe and worship it. But then, they see the existence of evil in the Universe and cannot attribute it to the Absolute Light. Because of this perception, they put the Darkness against the Light, call them Yazdān and Ahrimān, and conceive of a struggle between them. And thus, they envision two equally powerful God in existence.⁷²³

The Ikhwān do not provide much detail about these subdivisions like al-Ghazālī does,⁷²⁴ but they insist, like al-Ghazālī, on the idea that some form of truth is present in every religion.⁷²⁵ They say that in every case, people such as idolaters who worship something rather than nothing are better than those who do not worship anything at all. These people, at least, have some kind of idea about the divine and try to get closer to it by taking some objects as their medium.⁷²⁶ Thus, it is possible to say that the Ikhwān, like al-Ghazālī, put those who have some form of religion over the materialists.

The second category of those who are veiled by the mixture of light and darkness are those who go beyond the attachments of sense perception but cannot go beyond the attachments of the imagination. They cannot imagine God without attributing him some form of corporeality. Their number is various. The lowest grade of them imagines their God as an

⁷²³ Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāṭ*, 181–182; *Niche*, 93.

⁷²⁴ In fact, in some cases their discussion is more detailed than the discussion of al-Ghazālī. See for example their discussion of dualism in *Rasā'il*, v. 3, 380–381.

⁷²⁵ *Rasā'il*, v. 3, 412.

⁷²⁶ *Rasā'il*, v. 3, 397–398.

individual who sits on top of a throne while the highest grade attributes to him only one direction, namely aboveness.⁷²⁷

The third category of those who are veiled by the mixture of light and darkness are those who go beyond the attachments of imagination, but who are stuck with the deficient analogies of their intellect. Their God transcends all forms of corporeality including the direction of aboveness. But in order to understand the attributes of God, such as speech, hearing, seeing, will, power, etc., they compare them with their own qualities. Some of them argue that his speech is like their speech, formed by sounds and letters, while the others go beyond this claim and argue that it is like their thoughts, without sounds and letters. In any case, they fail to apprehend these attributes and there is some form of anthropomorphism left in their conception of God.⁷²⁸

People who are veiled by imagination and the deficient analogies of the intellect in al-Ghazālī's classification are within the boundaries of Islam even though al-Ghazālī seems unsatisfied with their position. And again, a similar account of them is present in *Rasā'il* as well.

Similar to al-Ghazālī, the Ikhwān classify people based on their knowledge of God. Their classification again is part of their discussion of God's essence and his attributes. According to them, the first group of people believes that God is a virtuous individual (*shakhs*) with many praiseworthy characteristics and deeds. Some of these people believe that he resides in heaven above all creation, while others think that he is on top of the throne in heaven (*fawq al-'arsh fī al-samāwāt*). These believe that he is totally aware of the inhabitants of heaven and earth since he looks at them, hears their speech, and knows what is inside their

⁷²⁷ Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāṭ*, 182; *Niche*, 94.

⁷²⁸ Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāṭ*, 182–183; *Niche*, 94–95.

minds and hearts. This belief, according to the Ikhwān, is proper for the commoner, since it keeps them in accordance with the commands and prohibitions of religion and improves social relations for everybody.⁷²⁹ The Ikhwān do not elaborate why this belief is proper for the commoner, but their discussion is clear that these people comprehend the essence and attributes of God with some forms of corporeality.

There exists another group beyond the first which is wiser and more knowledgeable. Since their God is more abstract, they think that the belief held by the first group is false. For them, it must be believed that God is not an individual who occupies a place in space and time. Contrary to this, God is a spiritual form which affects the rest of creation with its force. He is immune to any changes and cannot be perceived by the senses. He knows the details of his creation completely even before their existence and after their perdition.⁷³⁰

Another group which is beyond the second in knowledge and wisdom believes that God cannot be a form since they know that a form cannot exist by itself without matter. They consider that God is a simple light from among the spiritual lights. As a spiritual light, he cannot be grasped by vision but his grasp is over all other visions.⁷³¹

The last group believes that God cannot be an individual or a form. On the contrary, he is a singular essence with complete oneness. He possesses a singular power with various kinds of wondrous action. Nobody from his creation can comprehend his quiddity, his quality, or the relation of his existence with time. Everything that exists emanates from him. The forms of creation manifest themselves in matter because of his will. When he decrees something, he only orders it to be, and then it is. He is the creator of all qualities without time and place, and

⁷²⁹ *Rasā'il*, v. 3, 422.

⁷³⁰ *Rasā'il*, v. 3, 422–423.

⁷³¹ *Rasā'il*, v. 3, 423.

he is present in everything without association and without combination.⁷³² The conception of this group, however, is closer to the conception of al-Ghazālī's final group.

4. 6 The Ending of *Niche*: Those Who are Veiled by Pure Light and Those Who Attain

Al-Ghazālī deals with those who are veiled by pure light and those who attain true cognition of God in the last three pages of *Niche*. This part of *Niche* is the most controversial part of the book, if not the most controversial in all of his works. Before talking about these controversies, it seems proper to talk about the content of these pages, which include the highest grades of people in al-Ghazālī's classification. Al-Ghazālī says that even though they are many in number, they can be classified under three categories.⁷³³

The people in the first category know the true meaning of God's attributes with certainty and realize that attributes such as speech, will, power, knowledge, etc. cannot be applied to God as they are applied to human beings. For this reason, they completely avoid describing God with these attributes and try to describe him by referring to his acts as Moses did in his answer to Pharaoh. When Pharaoh asked Moses what the Lord was, Moses answered that he is the mover and the orderer of the heavens.⁷³⁴ Even though al-Ghazālī uses the word "heaven" in plural, it becomes clear from his description of the second category that he means by it the heaven of the sublunar sphere.

The people in the second category go beyond the first group with their realization that there is multiplicity in heavens, and each heaven has its own mover called an angel. They understand that the relation of these angels to the spiritual lights is like the relation of the stars

⁷³² *Rasā'il*, v. 3, 423.

⁷³³ Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāṭ*, 183; *Niche*, 95.

⁷³⁴ Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāṭ*, 183; *Niche*, 95.

to physical lights. They also realize that these multiple heavens are enveloped by an outermost sphere whose movement is the cause of their movements. For them, God is the mover of the outermost sphere since, at this stage, all multiplicity is denied him.⁷³⁵

Those in the third category go beyond those in the second and become aware that the direct movement of the outermost sphere must be carried out by an angel who responds obediently to the command of the Lord of the Universe as an act of service and worship to him. According to them, God must be considered as the Mover of all, not by direct intervention (*lā bi-ṭarīq al-mubāsharah*), but by way of command (*bi-ṭarīq al-amr*) only. So then, for this group, God is the one who commands the movement and is obeyed by the angel. The relation of this angel to the divine light is like the relation of the moon to physical lights.⁷³⁶

In addition to these three, al-Ghazālī says that there is a fourth category consisting of those who attain (*al-wāṣilūn*) complete cognition of God. It becomes clear to these people that the attributes given to the Obeyed-one of the third category contradict the pure unity of God and his perfection. The reason for this contradiction, according to al-Ghazālī, is hidden behind a mystery and cannot be explained in a book such as *Niche*. The relation of the Obeyed-one to this Being is like the relation of the sun to the Essential Light. This Being as being the creator of all is beyond the multiple angels of heavens, the single angel of the outermost sphere, and the Obeyed-one who commands the movement of the outermost sphere. He is beyond everything that is comprehensible by sight and insight, and transcendent and free from every kind of characterization that was made previously in *Niche*.⁷³⁷

⁷³⁵ Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāṭ*, 184; *Niche*, 95.

⁷³⁶ Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāṭ*, 184; *Niche*, 96.

⁷³⁷ Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāṭ*, 184; *Niche*, 96.

W. H. T. Gairdner makes some deductions from the information given above. According to him, al-Ghazālī situates the theological schools of Islam, including the Ash‘arites, in the low place of the class of those veiled by the mixture of light and darkness. Thus, they are not included in these highest grades of men. He finds it puzzling that al-Ghazālī gives a special importance to the philosophical doctrine of heavenly spheres in this part and uses it as a measurement in distinguishing these groups from each other. Gairdner also notes that al-Ghazālī was very critical of this doctrine in the days when he wrote *Incoherence*.⁷³⁸ What is more disturbing for Gairdner is that al-Ghazālī seems to still be embracing his earlier criticism of this doctrine during the days when he wrote *Deliverer*, a book which was written around the time of *Niche*’s publication.⁷³⁹ This apparent contradiction led Gairdner to think that al-Ghazālī had two sets of teachings, one for the general public and one for the elite.⁷⁴⁰

Gairdner states that this visible contradiction in al-Ghazālī was noticed before him by Ibn Rushd. Gairdner continues that according to Ibn Rushd, al-Ghazālī adheres to the philosophical doctrine of emanation in *Niche* by declaring that the mover of the outermost sphere emanates from God.⁷⁴¹ Based on these deductions and considerations, Gairdner sets out to examine whether Ibn Rushd was right in his accusation that al-Ghazālī adhered to the doctrine of emanation brought forward by Ibn Sīnā and al-Fārābī. Even though Gairdner

⁷³⁸ W. H. T. Gairdner, “al-Ghazālī’s *Mishkāt al-Anwār* and the Ghazālī Problem,” *Der Islam*, 5 (1914), 130–131.

⁷³⁹ Gairdner, “al-Ghazālī’s *Mishkāt*,” 134.

⁷⁴⁰ Gairdner, “al-Ghazālī’s *Mishkāt*,” 144.

⁷⁴¹ Gairdner, “al-Ghazālī’s *Mishkāt*,” 133–134.

argues on linguistic grounds that al-Ghazālī stands vindicated, he does not provide a definitive answer for the solution of the problem.⁷⁴²

W. M. Watt, however, offers a radical solution to this problem by asserting that the last section of *Niche* was a later addition to the book by a Neoplatonist forger who wanted to spread these ideas by using al-Ghazālī's reputation.⁷⁴³ According to Watt, the ideas presented in the last section of *Niche* contradict and are incompatible with al-Ghazālī's overall theological views in general and the first two sections of *Niche* in particular. Watt argues that while the rest of *Niche* "is, as definitely, not Neoplatonic," he states that "the Veils-section is definitely Neoplatonic in its outlook."⁷⁴⁴

In opposition to Watt, Hermann Landolt asserts that not just the Veils-section but all three sections of *Niche* are Neoplatonic in character, and that the source of their Neoplatonism is the forty-second epistle of the Ikhwān entitled *fī al-āra' wa al-diyānāt* (on doctrines and religions.).⁷⁴⁵ Thus, Landolt argues that the Veils-section is indeed heretical in nature and cannot be harmonized with theological orthodoxy as conceived by Watt, "although it is by no means 'incompatible' with major points made by al-Ghazālī in the *Iḥyā'*, and certainly not with the major part of the *Mishkāt* itself."⁷⁴⁶

⁷⁴² According to Gairdner, the word used by Ibn Rushd in his accusation is *ṣadara*, and this is the word al-Ghazālī uses in his critique in *Incoherence*. But in *Niche* al-Ghazālī uses the word *fāḍa*, and there is a difference of meaning between these two. See Gairdner, "al-Ghazālī's *Mishkāt*," 137–141. I would note here that the word *fāḍa* is dear to the Ikhwān as well.

⁷⁴³ William M. Watt, "A Forgery," 9.

⁷⁴⁴ William M. Watt, "A Forgery," 8.

⁷⁴⁵ Landolt, "Ghazālī and 'Religionswissenschaft,'" 28–29.

⁷⁴⁶ Landolt, "Ghazālī and 'Religionswissenschaft,'" 22–23.

Based on the last section of *Niche*, Frank Griffel argues that, at least in *Niche*, al-Ghazālī puts forward a model in which a hierarchical order of celestial beings created by God governs the universe by means of secondary causality.⁷⁴⁷ For Griffel, while formulating this model, al-Ghazālī adopts the cosmology of al-Fārābī with all its spheres, movers, and the First Being. The only crucial thing al-Ghazālī does is his addition of another layer of creation to the cosmology of al-Fārābī. With this addition, al-Ghazālī saves God’s unity and creative activity by “converting it into ‘the command’ (*al-amr*) by which the creation of heavens and earth unfolds.”⁷⁴⁸

Al-Ghazālī’s adaptation of the philosophical doctrine of heavenly spheres in *Niche* is treated again in connection with the philosophy of al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā by the scholars mentioned above. The only exception among them is Hermann Landolt. As noted by Landolt, al-Ghazālī uses *Rasā’il* as his source while composing *Niche*. In fact, al-Ghazālī does not even add anything to the model of heavenly spheres of the Ikhwān. The supposed addition, which is considered by Griffel as al-Ghazālī’s own innovation, is already present in *Rasā’il*.

According to the Ikhwān, there are nine spheres in existence that are set one inside the other like the rings of an onion. They make ten with the addition of the Earth. The Earth takes its place at the center like the yolk of an egg. The sphere of air encloses the Earth in all directions and separates it from the sphere of the moon. Above the moon, there exist five spheres of the pre-modern planets of Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn, with the sphere of the sun standing in the middle. Above them, there exist two more spheres, the sphere of the fixed stars and the highest starless sphere. The Ikhwān affirm that every sphere

⁷⁴⁷ Frank Griffel, “Al-Ghazālī’s Cosmology in the Veil Section of his *Mishkāt al-Anwār*,” in *Avicenna and His Legacy: A Golden Age of Science and Philosophy*, ed. Y. T. Langermann (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), 31.

⁷⁴⁸ Griffel, “Al-Ghazālī’s Cosmology,” 44.

in this model has its own soul which is named by religion as angels.⁷⁴⁹ The highest sphere rotates like a wheel (*dūlāb*) and completes its rotation in one day. With its rotation, it also causes the rotation of the rest of the spheres and the stars.⁷⁵⁰ The Ikhwān identify the Universal Soul as the soul of all worlds⁷⁵¹ and the mover of the highest sphere. It bestows existence upon what is inside it. Every kind of action inside the sphere of the Universal Soul emanates and comes down from it and rises back to it.⁷⁵²

As seen above, the people in the first category in the highest grades of al-Ghazālī realized that God was the mover of the lowest sphere. The second category realized that the spheres were multiple and recognized the mover of the outermost sphere as their God. The third category went beyond them by realizing that there was another being beyond it who gave the command to the mover of the outermost sphere. Al-Ghazālī names this last being as the Obeyed-one, and states that the forth category goes beyond this being by reaching another being which is completely transcendent. So, al-Ghazālī conceives in his model that there are two more levels of existence beyond the level of the mover of the outermost sphere.

Like in al-Ghazālī, there are two more levels of existence beyond the level of the mover of the outermost sphere in the Ikhwān. According to the Ikhwān, since God is truly one in every aspect, the rest of creation cannot be totally one in existence and must be multiple in

⁷⁴⁹ *Rasā'il*, v. 3, 153–154; v. 4, 179–187.

⁷⁵⁰ *Rasā'il*, v. 1, 137–139; *Epistles of The Brethren of Purity: On Astronomia: An Arabic Critical Edition and English Translation of EPISTLE 3*, ed. and trans. F. Jamil Ragep and Taro Mimura (Oxford: Oxford University Press in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2015), 25–27.

⁷⁵¹ *Rasā'il*, v. 1, 364; v. 2, 124; v. 3, 32.

⁷⁵² *Rasā'il*, v. 4, 198.

some way. For this reason, the first act of God, which is the cause of all causes, is not really one, but two in nature.⁷⁵³

The first level of existence beyond the level of the outermost sphere, and thus beyond the level of the Universal Soul, is the level of intellect. According to the Ikhwān, God is like number one and what comes after God is like number two in existence. The second in existence is the intellect, which is the first thing created by God out of nothing.⁷⁵⁴ As the closest thing to God, the intellect is the essential act of God which he carried out personally, and the efficient cause of everything below its own level. The intellect is an angel with no partner or opponent who can contend against his will or oppose his act. It is something completely pure and unadulterated which cannot be changed or altered. It is a spiritual and simple substance with pure lights and all perfection, and consists of the forms of everything in itself.⁷⁵⁵ It radiates its lights, manifests its effects, and encloses everything which goes out from it. The intellect belongs to God as his special act with no multiplicity.⁷⁵⁶ The Universal Soul moves the outermost sphere with the mediation of the intellect.⁷⁵⁷

Another indication which shows al-Ghazālī's reliance on *Rasā'il* instead of al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā in this matter is his choice of words when naming the First Intellect (*al-'aql al-awwal*). Al-Ghazālī names the First Intellect, which is also the first being originating from God, as the Active Intellect (*al-'aql al-fa'āl*). In the philosophy of al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā, however, the Active Intellect is identical with the lowest intellect and is the intellect of the

⁷⁵³ *Rasā'il*, v. 3, 164.

⁷⁵⁴ *Rasā'il*, v. 3, 166.

⁷⁵⁵ *Rasā'il*, v. 3, 151, 158.

⁷⁵⁶ *Rasā'il*, v. 4, 172.

⁷⁵⁷ *Rasā'il*, v. 3, 382.

sublunar sphere in their models.⁷⁵⁸ In contrast, both al-Ghazālī and the Ikhwān, name the First Intellect as the Active Intellect when they talk about its origin and mission.⁷⁵⁹

According to al-Ghazālī, one of the characteristics particular to the third category of the highest grades of men is their realization that God's direct intervention in his creation is a deficiency inappropriate for his Lordship. For this reason, they think that God intervenes in the creation not directly but by way of command. This notion is treated in *Rasā'il* as well with almost same words al-Ghazālī uses in *Niche*.⁷⁶⁰

In this context, the Ikhwān use the example of a magnet. According to them, there is an admonition in the magnet for those who are endowed with intellect and reflection about the workings of nature and God's intervention in it. The Ikhwān say that there is a relation and similarity of nature between the magnet and iron like the relation and similarity that exists between a lover and his beloved. Despite its strength over other minerals, vegetables, and animals, iron is moved towards the magnet, sticks to it, and gets attached to it like a lover gets attached to his beloved. When the intelligent man reflects on the behavior of these two objects, it becomes clear to him that since a body cannot act by its own agency, there must be an agent who moves them towards each other. Like these two objects, all bodies in the universe with their diversity and difference of nature, shape, and property are like the tools and instruments of the agent craftsman who is the cause of their movements. This craftsman is

⁷⁵⁸ Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge*, 105.

⁷⁵⁹ *Rasā'il*, v. 1, 71, 85, 364–366; v. 3, 32, 151, 158–159, 292, 382, 395.

⁷⁶⁰ *Rasā'il*, v. 2, 115–117; v. 3, 291.

the Universal Soul which is the source of all these influences called nature (*ṭabī'a*) and acts with the permission of Creator.⁷⁶¹

It is also clear to this intelligent man by rational proofs that the Creator is not in direct contact with these bodies and does not assume the responsibility of acting personally (*lā yubāshiru al-ajsām bi-dhātih wa lā yatawallā min al-af'āl bi-nafsih*). The only thing he does is the act of creating things into being out of nothing. As for acts such as composition, combination, and movement—which take place in time and space through tools and instruments—he commands his angels and his servants to do what they have been commanded. In this respect, he is similar to kings who command their servants, attendants, troops, helpers, and subjects and do not undertake any act by themselves because of their high position and remoteness. For example, they do not build a town by themselves by taking part directly in the act of building, but give the order for the town to be built. When the town is built, however, people say that it is built by the king. According to the Ikhwān, the example of the king clarifies the rule which governs the acts of angels and their links to God.⁷⁶²

It was seen above that in the highest grade of al-Ghazālī's classification God is described as a being beyond everything that is comprehensible by sight and insight and transcendent and free from every kind of characterization. This is the case in the philosophy of the Ikhwān as well. According to the Ikhwān, the friends of God perceive God unlike any other perception. This perception is not like the perception of any known entity—including

⁷⁶¹ *Rasā'il*, v. 2, 115; *Epistles of The Brethren of Purity: On the Natural Sciences: An Arabic Critical Edition and English Translation of EPISTLES 15–21*, ed. and trans. by Carmela Baffioni (Oxford: Oxford University Press in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2013), 275–276. For magnet in al-Ghazālī, see his *Incoherence*, 222.

⁷⁶² *Rasā'il*, v. 2, 117; *Epistles of The Brethren of Purity: EPISTLES 15–21*, 279–280. In this context, see also *Rasā'il*, v. 3, 291.

bodies, spirits, forms, species, genus, essences, accidents, attributes, and qualifications—but is more glorious and exalted than any other kind of perception. It is beyond every kind of material qualification and physical attribution.⁷⁶³ For the Ikhwān, even the perception of the friends of God is not sufficient for the true cognition of God. These attributes of God are not like any other attributes which exist in any one of his creation, and only God himself can perceive their true meaning.⁷⁶⁴

4. 7 Conclusion

The science of unveiling, which is the second subdivision in al-Ghazālī's Science of the Hereafter, is depicted by al-Ghazālī as the ultimate goal of spiritual journey. As seen in the earlier pages, al-Ghazālī's discussion of this science is always vague and elusive. However, it is possible to say that the content of this science is about God, his relation to his creation, the role of angels in this relation, man's cognition of these matters, and his destiny based on the extent of his cognition. Al-Ghazālī thinks that the content of this science must be kept away from the public, so that he is hesitant to name a book in which he treats these matters. But, almost of all of these matters are treated or touched upon by him in his controversial book, *Mishkāt al-Anwār* or *The Niche of Lights*. This situation might plausibly make *Niche* one of the books written to contribute to the science of unveiling.⁷⁶⁵

As seen in the third chapter, modern scholars have viewed al-Ghazālī's treatment of matters under the science of unveiling as paralleling what are called the metaphysical

⁷⁶³ *Rasā'il*, v. 3, 231. They say that it is a "perception of light in light for light from light." (*Hiya ru'yat nūr bi-nūr li-nūr fī nūr min nūr.*)

⁷⁶⁴ *Rasā'il*, v. 4, 173.

⁷⁶⁵ In fact, the full of name of the book supports this argument. The full name is *Mishkāt al-Anwār wa Miṣfāt al-Asrār*, which means *The Niche of Lights and the Filter of Secrets*.

sciences of philosophy, and almost invariably seek the source of this parallelism in the philosophy of Ibn Sīnā. While the philosophical tone of al-Ghazālī's discussion of these matters cannot be denied, this focus on Ibn Sīnā seems to be the result of an overestimation of his influence. At least, this seems to be the case in the example of *Niche*.⁷⁶⁶

Instead of Ibn Sīnā, *Rasā'il* seems to have been a stronger source of inspiration for al-Ghazālī in his composition of *Niche*. In fact, the textual similarities between them suggest that the role played by *Rasā'il* in the composition of *Niche* was greater than mere inspiration. This fact, previously noted by Hermann Landolt, has been substantiated more concretely throughout this chapter. Al-Ghazālī's treatment of God is almost identical with the treatment of the Ikhwān, and both classify men according to the extent of their knowledge of God. As already seen, the point taken by Treiger as the proof of Ibn Sīnā's influence, namely the discussion of quiddity, is present in *Rasā'il* in almost the same words. The model of heavenly spheres, used in the third section by al-Ghazālī and taken by Griffel as the influence of al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā, is also present in *Rasā'il*. In fact, what is considered to be al-Ghazālī's genuine addition to this model by Griffel is already present in model of Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' as well.

⁷⁶⁶ In his introduction to the Turkish translation of *Niche*, Mahmut Kaya claims that al-Ghazālī's most important source of inspiration while composing his book was Ibn Sīnā's *al-Ishārāt wa al-Tanbīhāt*, especially the ninth section of its metaphysics, entitled *Maqāmāt al-ʿArifīn*. See Gazzālī, *Miškātü'l-Envâr*, trans. Mahmut Kaya, (Istanbul: Klasik Yayınları, 2016), 6. In comparison to *Rasā'il*, the influence of this book seems trivial to me. See Ibn Sīnā, *İşaretler ve Tenbihler: (el-İşârât ve't-Tenbîhât)*, ed. and trans. Ali Durusoy, Muhittin Macit, and Ekrem Demirli (Istanbul: Litera Yayıncılık, 2005), 182–190.

CONCLUSION

According to Andalusian Sufi philosopher Ibn Sabʿīn (d. 669/1270), al-Ghazālī tried to bring opposing things together in his saddening delirium. In his words, al-Ghazālī did this because his understanding of both philosophy and Sufism was weaker than the web of a spider. He took the Sufi path out of necessity without understanding anything about it. He witnessed trifling things while he was on the path, imagined them to be absolute truths, and formed a high opinion about himself and his achievements. He shared the same opinion as the Pythagoreans regarding intellect. Like them, he used the word intellect for soul and claimed that the difference between them was in name only. He based his classification of souls in *Niche* on this idea. Most of the things he talked about in that book were taken from *Rasāʾil Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ*, and this made its contents as feeble as its source. Al-Ghazālī should thus have been thankful that he was mistakenly counted as an actual Muslim scholar, and should also have apologized to the public for living that lie.⁷⁶⁷

Although the words of Ibn Sabʿīn about the scholarly integrity of al-Ghazālī seem to have been said in an outburst and were likely something of an exaggeration, they were not completely baseless, at least in the case of the words about the connection between al-Ghazālī and Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ. Ibn Sabʿīn can even be considered moderate in his judgment when compared to others who named al-Ghazālī among the candidates for the unnamed authors of *Rasāʾil*.⁷⁶⁸

⁷⁶⁷ Ibn Sabʿīn, *Budd al-ʿĀrif*, ed. Jūrj Kattūrah (Beirut: Dār al-Andalus and Dār al-Kindī, 1978), 144–145.

⁷⁶⁸ Godefroid de Callatay, *Ikhwan al-Safaʾ: A Brotherhood of Idealists on the Fringe of Orthodox Islam* (Oxford: One World Press, 2005), 10; Abdel Latif Tibawi, “Ikhwān as-Safā and Their *Rasāʾil*: A Critical Review of a Century and a Half of Research,” *The Islamic Quarterly*, 1955, v. 2, no. 1, 39. According to de Callatay, the fourteenth-

Similar to Ibn Sabʿīn, W. H. T. Gairdner also noticed the intricacies in al-Ghazālī's thought after encountering *Niche*. Gairdner then pointed out that al-Ghazālī's stance regarding the connection between Sufism and philosophy was much more complicated than had previously been thought. The al-Ghazālī of *Niche* appeared to him as more sympathetic to philosophy, and he tried to explain this fact by arguing that al-Ghazālī might have seen the common link between Sufism and philosophy during the ten years he spent practicing Sufism. For Gairdner, such a conclusion was not completely implausible given the common Neoplatonic basis of both the Sufis and the philosophers.⁷⁶⁹

The Neoplatonic nature of al-Ghazālī's thought was emphasized by 'Abd al-Rahmān Badawī' as well when he was researching the philosophical sources of al-Ghazālī.⁷⁷⁰ Badawī claimed that while writing *Destruction*, al-Ghazālī was dependent on Proclus (d. 485) and John Philoponus (d. 570). Philoponus wrote a refutation against Proclus, who argued for the eternity of the world.⁷⁷¹ Al-Ghazālī reproduced the content of this debate in his book, though with a few linguistic modifications. His failure to mention these philosophers by name did not mean that he was unaware of them, since he never mentioned his sources. Beyond that, al-Ghazālī's acknowledgement of John Philoponus as his source would also reveal that he was relying on one philosopher while refuting another. This would undermine the strength of his

century Sunnī scholar al-Ṣafadī (d. 764/1363) reports this information. Unfortunately, de Callatay did not cite the source and I have not been able to identify it. Abdel Latif Tibawi too, when listing the alleged authors of *Rasā'il*, named al-Ghazālī among them without mentioning the source of this information.

⁷⁶⁹ W. H. T. Gairdner, "Al-Ghazālī's Mishkāṭ al-Anwār and the Ghazālī Problem," *Der Islam*, 5, 1914, 152–153.

⁷⁷⁰ 'Abd al-Rahmān Badawī, "al-Ghazālī wa-Maṣādiruhu al-Yūnāniyyah," in *Mihrijān al-Ghazālī fī Dimashq: Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī fī al-Dhikrā al-Miawiyyah al-Tāsiyah li-Mīlādihī*, ed. Zakī Najīb Maḥmūd (Cairo: Maṭbūʿat al-Majlis al-A'lā li-Riāyat al-Funūn wa-al-Ādāb wa-al-'Ulūm al-'Ijtimā'iyyah, 1962), 221–237.

⁷⁷¹ For the English translation of the book, see Philoponus, *Against Proclus On the Eternity of the World*, ed. Richard Sorabji (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 4 volumes.

refutation of their doctrines.⁷⁷² Badawī argued that al-Ghazālī's aim with the composition of *Destruction* was to refute the peripatetic philosophers, such as Proclus, who were influenced by the teachings of Aristotle. While constructing his own proofs against them, however, al-Ghazālī relied on other philosophers, such as Philoponus, who were influenced by the teachings of Plato. Thus, what al-Ghazālī did as a refutation was to replace one school of philosophy with another.⁷⁷³ When it came to Islamic philosophy, al-Ghazālī did the same thing, leaving the philosophy of Aristotle and its Muslim representatives in order to embrace the philosophy of Plotinus and Neoplatonism which, according to al-Ghazālī, was more compatible with Islam. To this philosophy al-Ghazālī stayed loyal until his death.⁷⁷⁴

The modern scholarship on al-Ghazālī seems to agree with these observations and to accept the Neoplatonic nature of al-Ghazālī's thought, albeit with a slight deviation in its trajectory of research. It has sought the origins of the Neoplatonic elements of al-Ghazālī's thought mostly in the philosophy of Ibn Sīnā. But, if Badawī is right in his observation, then it is highly plausible to think that Ibn Sīnā was the Aristotelian philosopher al-Ghazālī left in order to embrace the philosophy of Plotinus. For this reason, as this study has argued, it would have been more fruitful in the first place to look for the source of this Neoplatonism in Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' who, in the words of Ian Richard Netton, "were Neoplatonic teachers intent on, and infatuated with, the propagation of a doctrine of purity, achieved through asceticism, self-denial, and righteous living, as a passport for entry to the Islamic Heaven."⁷⁷⁵

⁷⁷² Badawī, "al-Ghazālī wa-Maṣādiruhu al-Yūnāniyyah," 223–224.

⁷⁷³ Badawī, "al-Ghazālī wa-Maṣādiruhu al-Yūnāniyyah," 224.

⁷⁷⁴ Badawī, "al-Ghazālī wa-Maṣādiruhu al-Yūnāniyyah," 236.

⁷⁷⁵ Ian Richard Netton, *Muslim Neoplatonists: An Introduction to the Thought of the Brethren of Purity (Ikhwān al-Ṣafā')* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991), 108.

The deviation did not happen by chance. Indeed, al-Ghazālī himself helped to craft it. As seen in the earlier pages of this study, Ibn Sabʿīn was not alone in making negative comments about the value of the philosophy of Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ. Other scholars did so too. Ironically, one such scholar was al-Ghazālī, whom Ibn Sabʿīn targeted because of the influence the Ikhwān exerted over him. In agreement with Ibn Sabʿīn and other scholars mentioned above, this study has aimed to show that *Rasāʾil Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ* were one of the main sources of philosophical influence over al-Ghazālī, despite his persistent negative comments about them.

The study sought to achieve this aim by showing in the first chapter that the earlier perception of al-Ghazālī as the mortal enemy of philosophy has been rejected completely by the most recent scholarship. According to the earlier perception, al-Ghazālī was the main antagonist of philosophy and the scholar who produced the most destructive ideas against it and who eventually caused its disappearance from Muslim societies. The polemics Ibn Rushd directed towards al-Ghazālī in this respect were picked up by European scholars—both because of the geographical proximity and availability of Ibn Rushd’s works in Europe—and these served to justify the plausibility of this perception.

In light of the most recent scholarship, however, the perception of al-Ghazālī has changed dramatically regarding his relation to philosophy. According to the new perception, al-Ghazālī appears now as a more progressive thinker compared to the Ashʿarites, with the argument that he broke his allegiance to that school and moved towards philosophy. As the central figure in Islamic philosophy, Ibn Sīnā has been considered as the main source of influence on al-Ghazālī in this regard. Accordingly, al-Ghazālī is now accepted as a kind of Trojan horse of philosophy in Islam with his particular kind of Avicennism. The recent scholarship also has challenged the sincerity of his autobiography, *Deliverer*, with the argument that it was an apologetic book produced under the special circumstances of the

Nishapur controversy, during which al-Ghazālī was accused of using philosophical ideas in his works.

The second chapter dealt with these circumstances which led al-Ghazālī to make negative comments about philosophy in general and the Ikhwān and their philosophy in particular. It showed that his comments about philosophy and *Rasā'il* cannot be taken literally and must instead be considered under the social and political conditions of the era. Because of these conditions, al-Ghazālī attempted to conceal his connection with philosophy, and not just the philosophy of Ibn Sīnā but also the philosophy of Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', as presented in their *Rasā'il*.

This chapter also showed that al-Ghazālī acknowledged that he studied philosophy at certain points in his life. However, he did not give exact information about the scope of his studies or the identity of the philosophers he read. Most of the time, he mentioned the names of Abū Nasr al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā, and declared his opposition to them in matters of metaphysics, which he formulated in *Destruction*. Nothing he said, however, implied that his engagement with philosophy was limited to these two philosophers. His treatment of philosophy in *Deliverer* revealed that his knowledge about the subject was vast, and that he also read the work of many others besides al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā. His remarks in *Deliverer* indicate that he also read the works of Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' very carefully.

The use of his letters in this chapter also revealed that one of the points on which he was accused was his adaptation of the philosophical teaching regarding the soul's alienness in this world and its desire to return to the sublime world where it originated. It was seen in the chapter that this teaching was one of the central tenets of *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Safā'*. It was also argued in the chapter that in order to lessen the danger he faced, al-Ghazālī gave precedence to mentioning the names of the so-called Sunnī philosophers, like al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā, over

Ikhwān al-Safā in the relevant sections of his autobiography and his letters. As Ibn Sīnā had done earlier, al-Ghazālī too attempted to distance himself from the Ikhwān as much as possible because of the existing negative perception of them. But when his connection to *Rasā'il* was discovered by his opponents, he tried to justify it by claiming that the origin of true doctrines found in the works of Ikhwān al-Safā was in fact the books of religion and the mystics. This attempt at justification should be taken as a veiled acknowledgement of his incorporation of their ideas into his works.

The third chapter focused on al-Ghazālī's new science, the Science of the Hereafter, and especially its first part, the science of practice, in order to identify what al-Ghazālī borrowed from the Ikhwān. The chapter described how after returning back to public life with his most important book, *The Revival of the Religious Sciences*, al-Ghazālī promoted a new method for the attainment of felicity, which he called the Science of the Hereafter. He divided this science into two parts, the science of practice and the science of unveiling, and devoted *Revival* to the first part of this division. Al-Ghazālī built the Science of the Hereafter on the dichotomy of this world and the hereafter. He reminded his reader that life in this world would go fast and come to an end in a short time. This did not mean, however, that life itself would come to an end with the death of body. In fact, the true component of man, which was the soul, would go on to live forever, either happily in reward or sadly in punishment depending on the investments made during life in this world. Investments in this world and neglect of the needs of the soul would result in sadness in the hereafter and the loss of eternal happiness.

According to al-Ghazālī, investment in the soul could only be made by acquiring knowledge and by practicing moral behavior. To convey his meaning more clearly, al-Ghazālī employed the analogy of a mirror. In this analogy, the soul in its relation to knowledge was like a mirror in its relation to forms. When clean and not twisted, it reflected the forms proper

to their true nature. Similarly, only by being pure and not twisted could the soul acquire the true nature of things regarding God, the universe, and human destiny. This was the true meaning of salvation.

This chapter showed that the new science of al-Ghazālī shared its principal notions and ideas with the philosophy of Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'. Like al-Ghazālī, the Ikhwān also presented their work, *Rasā'il*, as a guide in the path to the hereafter. According to them as well, the soul was the essential component of man. The wellbeing of the soul in the afterlife depended on the choices made in this world. Similar to al-Ghazālī, the Ikhwān claimed that the needs of the soul could only be provided by knowledge and practice. And like al-Ghazālī again, they likened the soul to a mirror in its relation to knowledge. Knowledge, as the food of the soul, strengthened it; and practice, by clearing the obstacles before it, opened the best way for the acquisition of knowledge. The chapter drew the conclusion that *Rasā'il* promoted al-Ghazālī's Science of the Hereafter long before al-Ghazālī himself did by pointing out the similarities between them.

The fourth chapter compared the content of the science of unveiling, which is the second part of the Science of the Hereafter, to *Rasā'il*, with particular attention to al-Ghazālī's *Niche of Lights*. Al-Ghazālī depicted this science as the ultimate goal of the spiritual journey and always talked about it in a vague and elusive manner. But despite this manner, the chapter argued that this science was about God, his relation to his creation, the role of angels in this relation, man's cognition of these matters, and his destiny based on the extent of his cognition. These matters were treated or touched upon in *Niche*, and this reveals it to have been one of the books written to contribute to this science.

It was also seen that recent scholarship has viewed al-Ghazālī's treatment of the science of unveiling as paralleling the metaphysical sciences of philosophy, and that recent

scholars have sought the source of this parallelism in the philosophy of Ibn Sīnā. This chapter argued that in the example of *Niche*, this focus on Ibn Sīnā as the philosophical source of al-Ghazālī's thought was not entirely correct. Instead of Ibn Sīnā, it showed that *Rasā'il* was a stronger source of inspiration for al-Ghazālī in *Niche*. In fact, the textual similarities between them suggested that *Rasā'il* was more than a mere inspiration in the composition of *Niche*. Al-Ghazālī's treatment of God was almost identical with the treatment of the Ikhwān, and both classify men according to the extent of their knowledge of God. The point taken by Alexander Treiger as the proof of Ibn Sīnā's influence, namely the discussion of quiddity, was present in *Rasā'il* in almost the same words. The model of heavenly spheres, used in the third section of *Niche* by al-Ghazālī and taken by Frank Griffel as a sign of the influence of al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā, was also present in *Rasā'il*. In fact, what was considered to be al-Ghazālī's genuine addition to this model was already elaborated in the model of Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' as well.

This study intends to contribute to a solution of "the Ghazālī Problem" by bringing the connection between al-Ghazālī and Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' more to the fore. The problem is expressed more clearly by Alexander Treiger with the question "Who was al-Ghazālī and what was his agenda as a theologian and a religious reformer?" Treiger answered this question by repeating one of the prevailing conceptions of al-Ghazālī with a new formulation. He stated that al-Ghazālī was neither a philosopher nor a Sufi, but he was a Sufi-philosopher. His Science of the Hereafter, and especially its second part, the science of unveiling, combined philosophy and Sufism in a way never seen before. Thus, by putting Sufism on a firm philosophical foundation, al-Ghazālī marked a turning point in the history of Sufism. In the following centuries, this move of al-Ghazālī's led to the foundation of theoretical Sufism

in the hands of Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 638/1240) and his school.⁷⁷⁶ By establishing the connection between al-Ghazālī and Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’, this study invites scholars to reconsider this position and to look back before al-Ghazālī to determine where the turning point really was.

⁷⁷⁶ Alexander Treiger, “The Science of Divine Disclosure: Gazālī’s Higher Theology and Its Philosophical Underpinnings” (PhD diss., Yale University, 2008), 334–335.

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